

# DIVA

A close-up portrait of actress Samira Wiley, looking directly at the camera with a slight smile. She has short, dark, curly hair and is wearing a dark blue, sleeveless top with horizontal stripes.

JULY 2015

EXCLUSIVE

Samira  
Wiley

ORANGE IS  
THE NEW  
BLACK'S  
POUSSEY

16 OF THE UK'S  
BEST LGBT-RUN  
HOLIDAY SPOTS

LESBIAN ROADKILL  
How British TV  
execs killed us off

HOW TO BE  
A GOOD  
BISEXUAL  
ALLY

WHAT'S IT LIKE TO BE  
IN A LESBIAN POLY  
RELATIONSHIP?

BUTCH  
SEXUALITY

Sex, with a  
distinctly  
androgynous  
flavour

IS Z-STAR  
THE LESBIAN  
JIM MORRISON?



**Lesbians have had ENOUGH!**

**This is what you've told  
us about FREE lesbian  
online dating ..**

**"Free means 'Plenty of Fakes'"**

**"I am happy to pay to meet women  
serious about meeting other women"**

**"I am happy to pay to meet genuine lesbians  
who are also looking for love"**

**"I WANT A QUALITY SITE  
WITH QUALITY WOMEN"**

**"I am happy to pay not to see  
all the same women I see on  
every free dating site"**

**"I am happy to pay to know  
the site is being monitored"**





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- Yes you will meet women serious about meeting other women
- Yes you will meet genuine lesbians looking for love
- Yes we will provide a quality site with quality women
- No you won't see all the same women you see on free lesbian dating sites
- Yes we will monitor the site and check all profiles and photos

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*We had 120 people to our wedding and it was beautiful. We have been very happily together for five years with four kids, a dog, cat and fish. Thank you Pink Sofa. You literally changed all of our lives.*

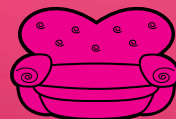
Kerrie and Sandy



*I met my partner Annie on the Pink Sofa. Since then we have moved in together, started our own business and we got married in New York. It was the best day of our lives. We can't believe our luck in finding the perfect partner on Pink Sofa.*

Kylee and Annie

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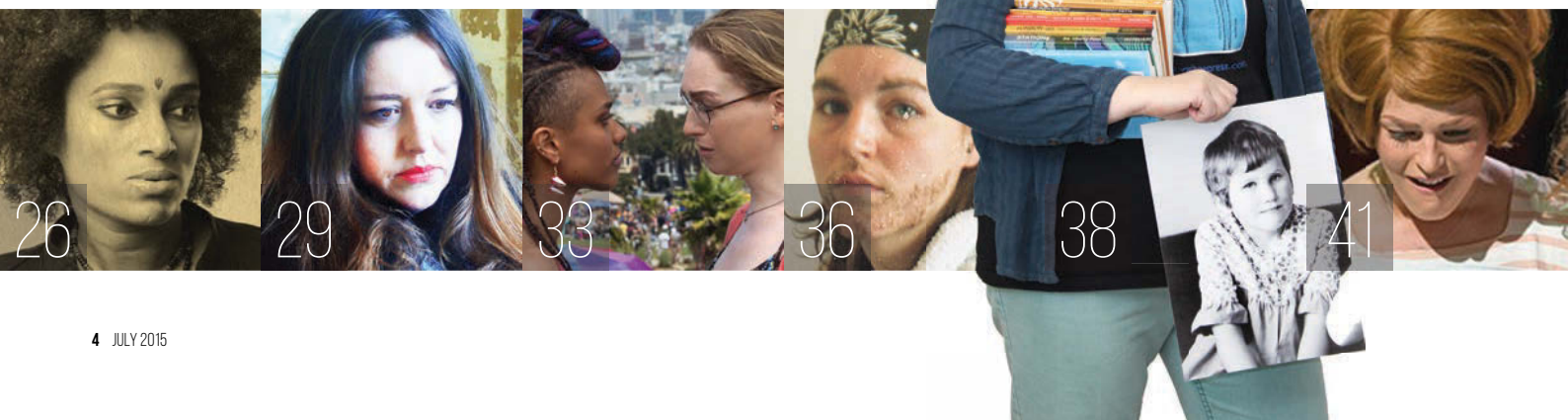


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Throughout the issue you will see this symbol, which indicates that there is digital content available related to that particular feature. You will be able to access this complementary content when you purchase our digital edition from [divadigital.co.uk](http://divadigital.co.uk) or directly through the DIVA branded app, available on the App Store, Google Play, Kindle Newsstand and Windows Store. (Please note that additional content may not be available via all of our third-part digital suppliers. However, buying the issue using one of the methods above will give you access to this content.)

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Sophy Holland  
[sophyholland.com](http://sophyholland.com)

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## EDITOR'S LETTER



Ok, so we admit it. We're OITNB-oholics. Not content with one OITNB star (last month's wonderful Ruby Rose), we've gone and got ourselves another Orange scoop with none other than fan favourite Samira Wiley (p60). We are capable of thinking about things other than our TV heroines, of course, but not for long, which is why we asked TV insider Jacquie Lawrence to find out why British TV execs seem to be less comfortable with lesbian characters and drama than their US counterparts (p46). Mainstream film doesn't always come up trumps either

but in indie novels and online, queer sci-fi fans are changing the world as we know it (p42). And so are bi allies like Cyd Sturgess, who writes about how lesbians can best support our bi sisters and partners (p54). For those of you planning a holiday, what better than a staycation at one of Britain's best LGBT-friendly hotels and B&Bs? We've scoured the nation so you don't have to (p74). We're also thrilled to feature an interview with the powerhouse singer Z-Star, who already sounds like a rock legend (p26). Then there's the brilliant work being done at Room To Heal where lesbian asylum seekers can find safety and community. With London's two national Pride events (p24, p96) coming up this month, it's important to remember that there are 78 countries in the world that still don't grant the relative freedoms we enjoy in the UK. And finally, if you love DIVA and want to have a peek at the digital extras, you can download this issue at [divadigital.co.uk](http://divadigital.co.uk).

**Jane Czynszelska**  
**DIVAMAG.CO.UK**

## NEXT MONTH



### AUGUST ISSUE on sale 23 July 2015

Mary Lambert speaks to DIVA about new album, Heart On My Sleeve  
Bisexual stunt woman Tiger Rudge spills on her movie thrills  
Trans 101: Everything you wanted to know about being trans but were afraid to ask  
Meet the Ladies of Llangollen, the coolest lady-lovers you've never heard of  
Hair today? Why everything's changing on the fuzz front  
O'Hooley and Tidow: Britain's best-loved folk duo get down with DIVA  
Where are all the bisexuals on TV?  
Calling all Backdoor Betties! Your guide to enjoyable anal sex

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Email [edit@divamag.co.uk](mailto:edit@divamag.co.uk) and tell us all about it



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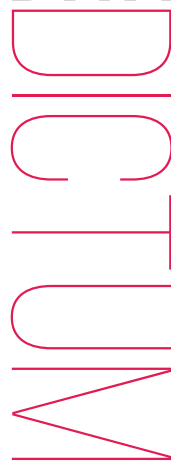


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Find out how to apply at [tinyurl.com/DIVAworkexperience](http://tinyurl.com/DIVAworkexperience)



## DIVA



### What's your best Pride memory?

**Editor** Jane Czynszelska  
"Tears of joy shed with 1000s of proud queers"  
**Deputy editor** Louise Carolin  
"Seeing the excitement of the first-timers, every year"  
**Editorial assistant** Carrie Lyell  
"Feeling inspired at San Francisco's Dyke March 2010"  
**Designer** Fernando Safont  
"London 2003. Feeling that I wasn't the only one after all!"

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**Books editor** Eden Carter Wood  
**Film editor** Lucy Peters  
**Travel editor** Lucy Fry  
**Diary editor** Dora Mortimer  
**Art editor** Anna McNay  
**Sex/life editor** Anna Sansom  
**Big thanks to:** Sarah Westwood, Fran Hayden, Joanna Benecke, Anisa Easterbrook

**Head of Advertising** Ash Allibhai  
Tel: +44 (0)20 7424 7406 [ash@millivres.co.uk](mailto:ash@millivres.co.uk)  
**Key Account Manager** Raj Valentino  
Tel: +44 (0)20 7424 7457 [raj.valentino@millivres.co.uk](mailto:raj.valentino@millivres.co.uk)  
**Classified Advertising Sales** Joao Vasconcelos  
Tel: +44 (0)20 7424 7451 [jo@divamag.co.uk](mailto:jo@divamag.co.uk)

**Design & production manager** Alexander Smith  
**Media copy sales & marketing manager** Rory Garriock  
**Management accountant** Arnaud Seguin

**Editorial** 020 7424 7400  
**Sales/distribution** 020 7424 7400, fax 020 7424 7401  
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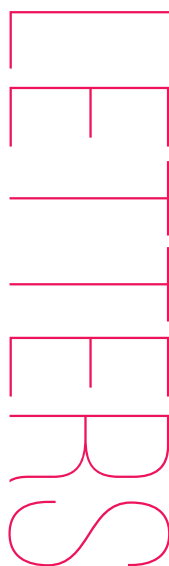


## Star Letter

### I CAME OUT AT MY JOB INTERVIEW

Last month, I attended an interview for a teaching post, having recently qualified. The vacancy was for a college in a small town in Yorkshire, which I approached with trepidation. Small towns, small minds; the homophobic possibilities were endless. When the dreaded stock interview questions were over, one of the interviewers asked me if I consider myself to be a good role model. I took a deep breath, and – knowing that I would probably regret this later – told her that as an openly gay teacher, who had been very honest with students about my position as a member of the LGBT community, I had taught acceptance and encouraged students to celebrate diversity. Not only did I get the job, but I was praised in an email for my honesty and “pursuit of equality”. I was so sure I was going to be turned down due to my answer, and was surprised by the positivity of the feedback. We shouldn’t have to hide ourselves, on paper or in person (*Could Your Gay CV Stop You Getting A Job?* June). Clichéd though this is, things will get better.

CHARLY



### STAR LETTER PRIZE

The writer of this month's star letter will receive a Microsoft Lumia 435 Windows mobile smartphone. Compact and smart, the Microsoft Lumia 435 comes packed with fantastic Microsoft services to help you get the most out of your phone, including

Cortana, your personal digital assistant, and 30GB of free OneDrive cloud storage. We want the Lumia 435 for ourselves!

WIN!



### THE COURAGE TO COME OUT

I don't know where to begin. I've kept a secret for almost 40 years. It was a miracle I came out at all. I thought I'd die having never told anyone. I could hardly admit it to myself. It revealed itself after a bout of depression. But I'm glad it's out there. I've never experienced another woman (but I'm gay, believe me, I know!). I hate the L-word – you know, London! But that's just me. Anyway, you can imagine the pain I've been through, I'm sure. That's why I still can't believe I actually asked for your magazine in the library. I did “try” to tell my mother when I was 19, but she just told me not to be stupid, etc. I don't know if I'll ever meet anyone. Still, I've expressed myself, and am so glad to have told your magazine. I'm a bit autistic as well, so this can make telling people harder. I've written to a lady police officer (she's on television in Road Wars). It's just fan mail and I don't expect a reply. (But at least I did it!)

FJM

### OH BBC, YOU'RE KILLING US

I read with interest the article detailing the BBC's response to the lesbian community's recent fury over the use of the dead lesbian trope to facilitate good drama (*Mediawatch*, June). I think it's great that DIVA is representing its readership's concerns, so thank you for that. However, I was incensed to read that the BBC's drama controller, Ben Stephenson, believes that this “is the wrong conversation to be having.” Really?! He then goes on to say that our frustration should be pointed at shows that don't have diversity rather than at

those shows who do.

It seems to me that Mr Stephenson and the BBC have failed to appreciate that the “conversation” regarding diversity and representation has moved on a little in the past decade. The BBC's own diversity plan includes the stated aim to: “Ensure diverse voices are reflected in key mainstream programming and slots to serve the full range of UK audiences better, especially BAME audiences.”

Further, their diversity strategy states that diverse representation should be: “Not just more portrayal, but a balanced portrayal that reflects their experience in a way that is accurate, authentic and non-stereotypical, across a range of programme genres, and where ‘difference’ is sometimes incidental and not always the primary point to a story we are telling.” Mr Stephenson however seems to be telling us that as long as they tick that diversity representations box then we should be happy. Hmmm, I'm not sure that ties in with their strategy and it definitely doesn't reflect the conversation that we want to be having.

I look forward to this conversation continuing with an outcome that reflects the balanced portrayal the BBC's lesbian audience wants. In the meantime, thanks for keeping our concerns highlighted and our conversations heard.

PENNY MEDLYN

*ED: Don't miss the article on p50 of this issue, in which we speak to BBC1 controller Charlotte Moore and return to this subject in more depth.*

Opinions expressed by correspondents and contributors do not necessarily reflect the views of the editors of DIVA magazine or its publishers. Correspondence may be edited.

## WRITE TO US

[letters@divamag.co.uk](mailto:letters@divamag.co.uk)

or use the old-fashioned method and drop us a line at

### DIVA MAGAZINE

Spectrum House, Unit M  
32-34 Gordon House Road  
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United Kingdom





Sister insider: what's going on between Crazy Eyes and Taystee? We'll find out in season three of *Orange Is The New Black*

## CORRECTION

In the April issue's My Scene spot, we mistakenly described Gabrielle's Hotel in Blackpool as women-only. Heather and Helen of Gabrielle's have been in touch to say that they now welcome all guests. [gabrielleshotel.co.uk](http://gabrielleshotel.co.uk)

Congratulations to everyone who spotted our mistake on p62 last month. Missed it? Look again!



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@shellflyer

Who needs a wife when you can take @DIVAMagazine to bed... Well, actually... Looking.

@MissFayeTierney

You just keep getting better and better @DIVAMagazine thank you x

@floforrester

Ha buying @DIVAMagazine and my stonewall sticker fell right out of my purse onto the counter, couldn't look any more gay right now.

@MarciHawkins

Just started reading the new @DIVAMagazine and 2 of the letters are about trans lesbians. Did I mention I love DIVA? 'Cos I do.

@janeager

A month seems so long to get the next copy then I devour it in one evening :D

@chemicalsoph

You know when someone writes something that you can't express? Well @SusanCalman has done just that in this month's @DIVAMagazine.

@DomesticWitch

Bought a copy of @DIVAMagazine for the first time the other day, it's a fantastic read! Loving every page.

@alicyrderxtc

Buying @DIVAMagazine and the man at the till informs me its for 'lesbians', to which I reply, I know' to his wide eyed face.

Pleased to meet you!



NAME & AGE:

ELISABETH, 48

FROM:

NOTTINGHAMSHIRE

OCCUPATION:

OCCUPATIONAL THERAPIST

IDENTITY:

LESBIAN



Every issue, we invite one of our readers to tell us about her relationship with DIVA.

## WHAT MADE YOU START READING DIVA?

I discovered DIVA many years ago when I was starting to come to terms with my sexuality. It made me feel in touch with others and not so alone.

## HOW LONG HAVE YOU BEEN A READER?

I actually can't remember as it's been such a long time, but I'd say, pretty much all of my adult life.

## PRINT OR DIGITAL?

Originally print but since getting my iPad I've discovered the delights of digital.

## WHAT DO YOU LIKE BEST ABOUT DIVA?

I enjoy the interesting article on a wide range of topics, particularly those about inspirational women.

## WHO ELSE READS YOUR COPY?

Just me, my girlfriend is more interested in National Geographic.

## WHAT HAPPENS TO YOUR COPY WHEN YOU'VE READ IT?

I keep it. I enjoy dipping back into some articles.

## WANT TO INTRODUCE YOURSELF?

Send a photo and your answers to the questions above to [letters@divamag.co.uk](mailto:letters@divamag.co.uk)

## WHO WOULD YOU PUT ON THE COVER OF DIVA AND WHY?

I always love seeing Heather Peace (doesn't everyone?) but I'd also like to see more representation of inspirational lesbian/bi women from the disabled community as this is something close to my heart.



# DIVA

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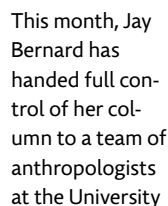
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Other suggestions, such as Jay riding a tiny bicycle on the pavement while talking on the phone, or writing poetry about dating an African Queen were considered but rejected. In the end, we opted for the barber shop – the ultimate symbol of the class, gender and racial lines that exist in the UK. We figured Jay would be especially crap at that.

After about 20 minutes of sitting in the barber shop, Jay made eye contact with a man who was sitting in the chair, watching the football. Jay did not speak, as she appeared to be sticking to an unspoken rule that when you enter a barber shop, you're supposed to sit down silently and wait for some sort of cue. Jay clearly has no idea what this cue is, and is too intent on seeming cool and like she should totally be there, to ask whether the man sitting idly in the barber chair is in fact a barber waiting to barb. After 40 minutes, Jay notices that several other men have come in and out, but she still has not been seen. An hour later, the

Jay is intent on seeming cool and like she should totally be there

Moreover, Jay has told us that in all the years she has gone to these barber shops, not one person has ever, ever, acted in an aggressive or homophobic manner. Indeed, she has had some lovely conversations with guys who come from the same part of Jamaica her family does – about how nice sugar cane is, how sad everyone still is that Air Jamaica no longer exists. Sure, Jay is one funny-looking bastard at times, but the barbers have always been kind. So, as researchers, we hope our studies can begin to explain what, exactly, her problem is. **D**





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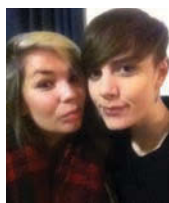
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# That's not why we're doing it!

RUTH FOWLER  
& ELISA HAF  
TALK ABOUT  
BEING A  
LESBIAN  
COUPLE  
IN A POLY  
RELATIONSHIP



To most couples, the words, "I think we should see other people" are code for "it's over". One of you wants to

insult the other so much that she just has to break up with you.

Which is why, in our relationship, it was out there from the beginning. It's tempting to be less upfront about it though, as being openly non-monogamous often translates, ironically enough, into a much quieter love life. As Elisa put it: "I've learned the hard way that most people don't like the idea of other people touching their things. Fortunately, I don't like people thinking of me as a thing, or as theirs, so being non-monogamous, or at most monogamish, is proving to be a good bullshit filter for me." That's the upside.

There are a lot of downsides though, especially for lesbians. Number one is the fear that your girlfriends might just be going along with it when they don't really want to because the lesbian dating pool is tiny and it's even tinier in a small town like the one where we met.

Number two is the intense discomfort of knowing that if a woman you're seeing is also seeing a man – and there are a lot more bisexual women than there are lesbians – then that relationship is at a seriously unfair social advantage over her relationship with you. And number three is the frustration of having to repeatedly explain to people whose business it isn't that no, it's not

cheating; it's not because, as members of a sexual minority, we're inherently slutty; it's certainly not because a lesbian relationship is somehow less fulfilling than a hetero one, or because we don't really love each other, and it's not just an experimental phase we're going through. Doesn't that last bit sound a little too familiar to anyone who's had a coming out experience?

Downside one and two probably won't get solved until we've established the feminist utopia, and most of number three has to be shrugged off, because "haters gonna hate, bigots gonna be bigoted". But the part about it just being a phase or an experiment is really hurtful because to us it's a considered position, that position being that we don't want to make what seems like an arbitrary promise at the beginning of a relationship that no matter what happens in the future, or what kind of chemistry we might develop with other people, we'll limit ourselves to the strikingly unhealthy options of either frustrating ourselves and probably resenting each other, or cheating on each other and probably hating ourselves. Or, of course, abandoning each other. A lot of people say they'd feel insecure in an open relationship, but from this perspective, there'd be more reason to feel that way if we were exclusive.

Acknowledging what we both know – that you don't stop fancying other people when you're in a relationship – removes the cause of a lot of arguments, too. So she was eyeing up the waitress? So she blatantly has a

crush on someone at work? So she has a hicky from someone else? You might get jealous (you might get turned on, you might experience compersion), what you don't do is act entitled with it, you act like a human being with instincts and emotional responses but not like someone who thinks their emotional responses should govern their behaviour and even the way other people are allowed to behave. Feeling upset doesn't suddenly become an excuse to turn into a raging monster (or a sulking one, depending on how you roll). Although maybe it does become a prompt to say: "Hey, obviously we agreed that we could both see other people and I am, technically, happy about anything that makes you happy as long as it isn't really bad for you (like, don't take heroin!) but I'm also feeling kind of squeamish about it right now, so can we have a cuddle? I could do with some reassurance and maybe some 'us time' soon." Doesn't that feel so much more constructive than throwing plates?

It's hard to summon the energy to explain all this every time you come out as being non-monogamous, though. So a good trick is to just flip the inevitable questions and ask your interrogators to explain why they are monogamous. People haven't usually given it much thought. And if it's not something you have to give much thought to, if it gets a free pass in this society of woefully fucked up, patriarchal relationship norms, then it's probably something worth thinking about. **D**

You don't  
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when  
you're in  
a relation-  
ship



# SUPPORTING YOUR PRIDE



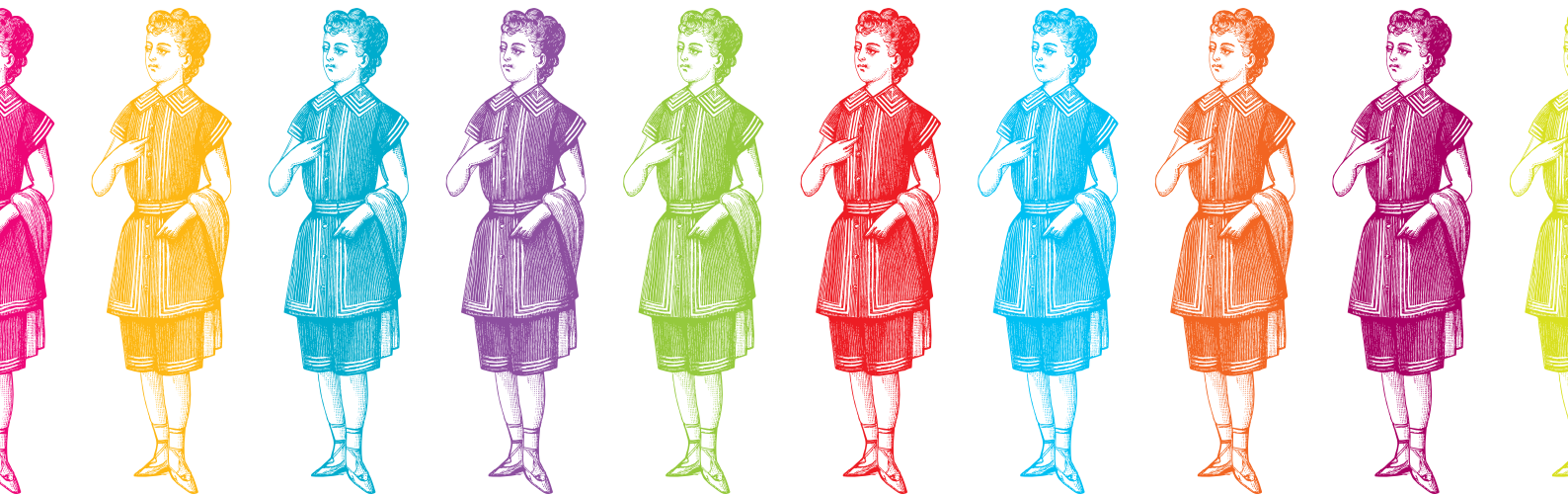
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# Happy Swimsuit Season!

CHARLOTTE COOPER GIVES PROTEIN WORLD THE TWO-FINGERED SALUTE



Even though it feels omnipresent, the marketing of body anxiety through weight loss, fitness regimes and other forms

of body management boils down to two splotches on the calendar: New Year/New You and Swimsuit Season. When people are either full of holiday regrets or anticipating a regretful holiday, they are vulnerable to suggestions of not measuring up.

Earlier this year, Protein World, which uses nebulous promises to sell expensive powders and pills, launched an advertising campaign typifying Swimsuit Season logic with a picture of a blonde babe in a bikini and an accompanying slogan: "Are you beach body ready?" It came as a surprise to everyone when women of all sizes decided that, actually, they don't have to put up with crap like this after all. Hashtag activism led to the advert being pulled by the Advertising Standards Authority and the whole thing blew up in the company's face. No amount of fire-fighting by Protein World made a difference, their execs dismissed the protesters as insecure and even got Katie Hopkins on board to support the brand.

Although Protein World claim the ad increased sales, within weeks the

campaign was being described by some in the PR industry as a major flop. I don't have the kind of body that Protein World would want to put in their adverts and I don't mind. Feeling OK about myself is not amazing magic, there are many social messages telling me that I should hate my body, how I feel is an on-going process of learning not to capitulate to them. This is how I do it:


Firstly, I've learned to appreciate my body through doing things with it. I like to swish my body through the sea or a swimming pool, stroke a cat, dance like an angry gorilla, sleep. I really enjoy its ability to heal from injury, give me pleasure, express things, burp and fart.

Secondly, I have been developing political ideas about what it's like to have a body for about 30 years. Feminism, queer theory, trans and disability activism, Marxism, postmodernism, postcolonialism, punk and anarchism have helped me find some answers to the questions of why some bodies have more political power than others, some are seen as normal and others are suspect, some are thought of as good and some as bad. I don't see these inequalities as natural or right, and I have developed a series of lenses through which to understand my own political body. It's harder to hate yourself when you can see how hatred is cultivated by oppressive systems.

Thirdly, I spend a lot of time connecting with other people and talking

about this stuff. I am part of networks and communities of people around the world who are working out ways to help each other feel alright about their bodies. I am able to support people and be supported by them. This helps me feel that hating my body is not inevitable.

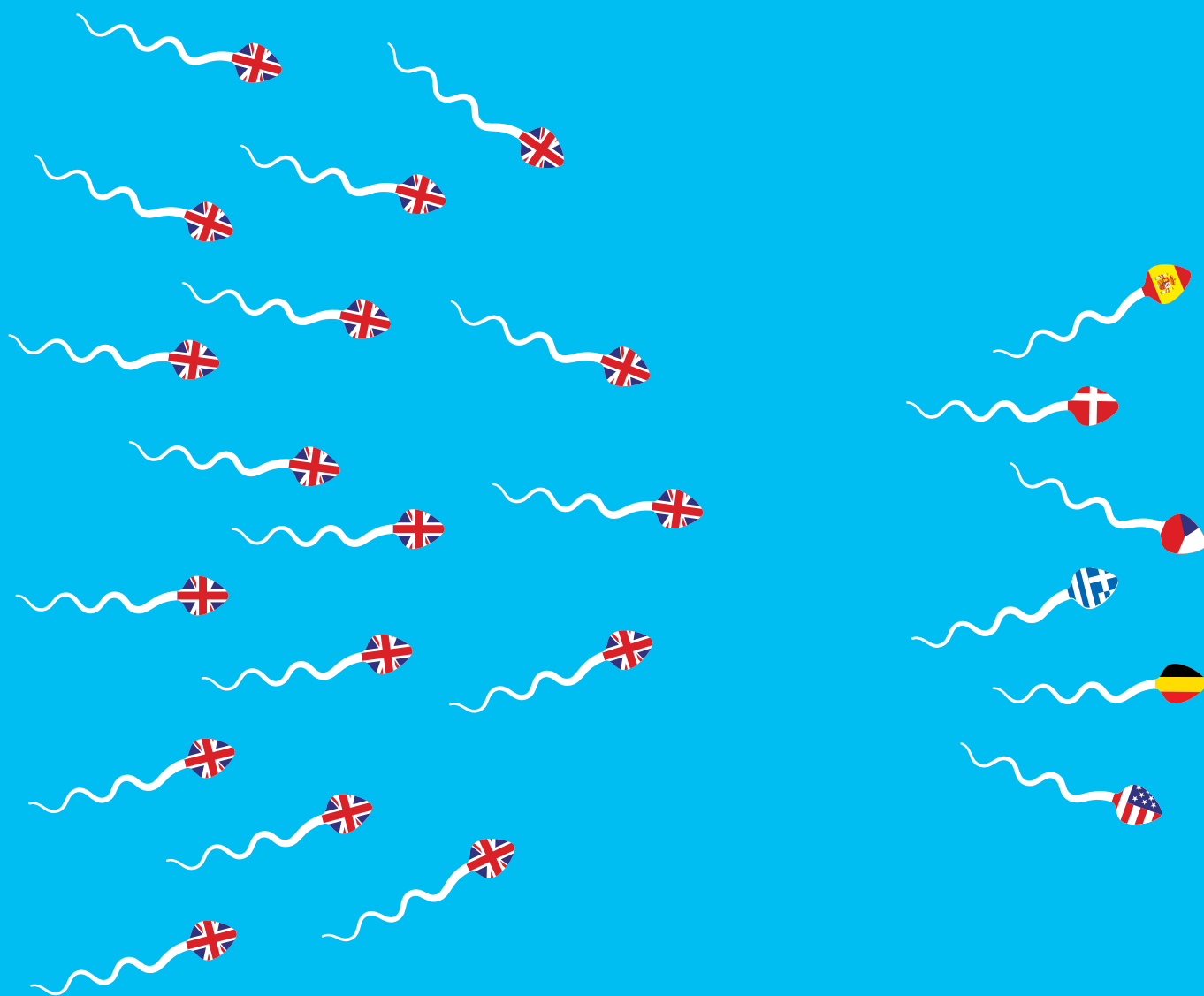
I love it best when these three elements come together in one space. Over the summer I have been part of the New Empowering School, a series of dance workshops that include people from different backgrounds who have different kinds of bodies. Through talking, dancing and working as a group over a period of time we have been able to find ways to accommodate our bodies. Sometimes this happens in very small ways, through a conversation, or in larger ways, like when we perform a complicated dance score together. It's not painful, we laugh a lot and it feels fabulous to have found each other. At the same time I am writing a book about fat activism which will be published in January, to coincide with New Year/New You and hopefully disrupt it a little. The dancing is in the book, it all joins up.

Feeling your body, recognising it as political and creating community to explore that is a long way away from Protein World's beach body. This is how things change. Happy Swimsuit Season! 

[charlotte@divamag.co.uk](mailto:charlotte@divamag.co.uk)

I like to swish my body through the sea, dance like an angry gorilla, sleep





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# GOLD RUSH


LET'S TAKE A MINUTE TO APPRECIATE JASMINE ALEXANDER, A JEWELLER WITH AN EXQUISITE TALENT

Described as the Vivienne Westwood of the British jewellery industry, Jasmine Alexander has an exquisite talent. But it was one that was almost never realised.

A tumultuous childhood led Jasmine to turn her back on society and she lived with no human contact for several years. A reclusive life brought a great deal of introspection, and aged 28, the Surrey-based artist decided to pursue a career as a jeweller. For Jasmine, though, it wasn't a choice and she says: "I do it because I need to."

That passion extends beyond jewellery into philanthropy and in May she took part in an project alongside other creatives including Paul Smith and Cara Delavigne to raise money for The Art Room, a charity offering art therapy to children to boost their confidence and self-esteem.

For six weeks, each artist's beautiful transformation of Race Furniture's classic BA2 chair was displayed in Selfridges. The pieces were then auctioned off, with all proceeds going to the charity. Jasmine, and all the artists involved, donated their time and materials free of charge.

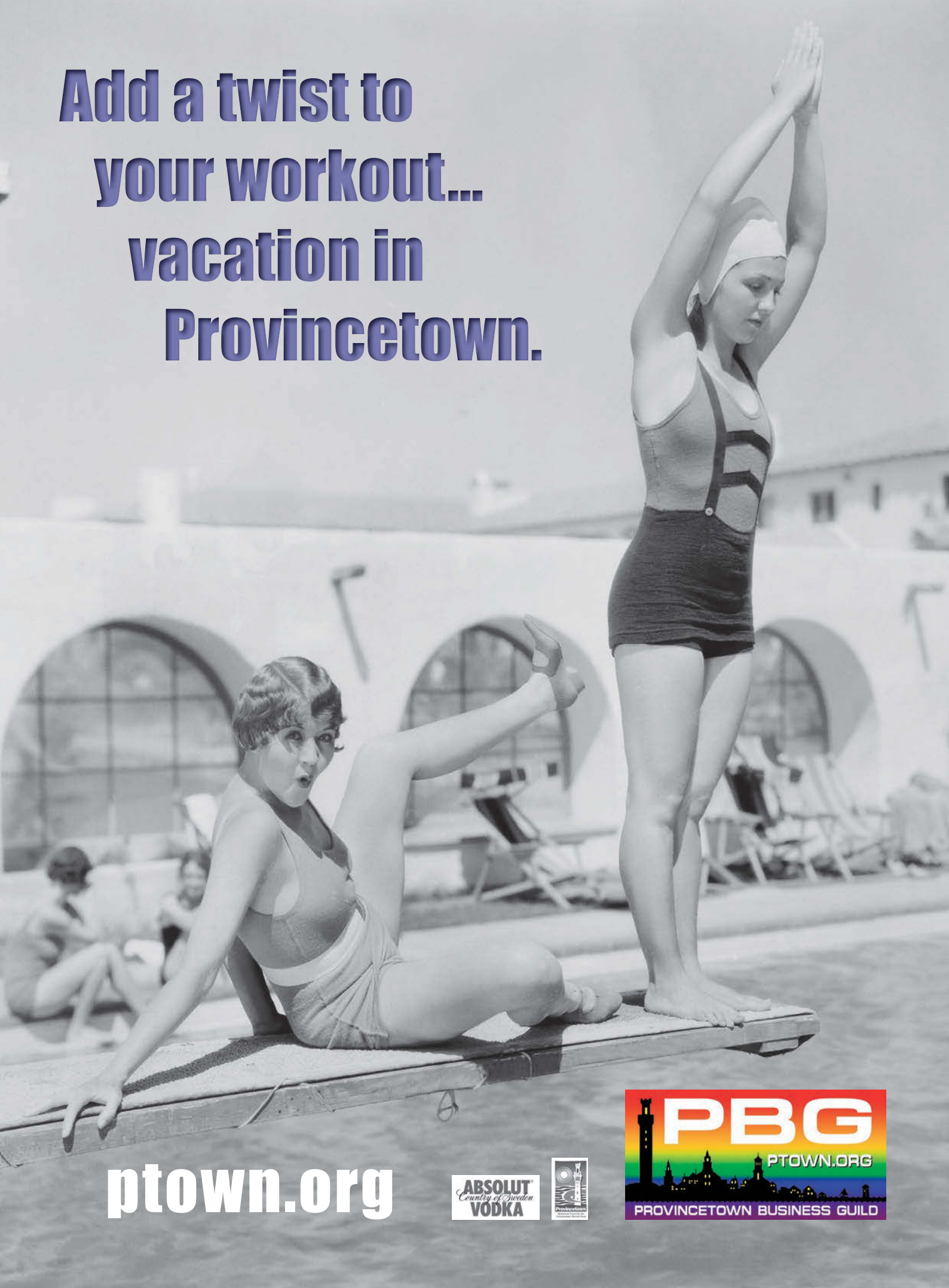
It's no surprise, really, because Jasmine does what she does for love, not money. Says Jasmine: "I am utterly fascinated by gold. Not for its financial worth, but its multifaceted ability to be all things to all men. And when we are gone, and all but dust and remains, these shimmering perfect conversations shall be left, found and pondered. That in itself is poetry." 

Art auction: chairs for charity





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# The second Mrs Calman



My wife has a strange memory. It's neither good nor bad, but what it most certainly is, is selective.

She will often deny all knowledge of a conversation we had yesterday, yet remembers, in detail, a minor incident a decade ago. To make my life even more frightening, she's also a litigator. Which, in essence, means she's the kind of lawyer who stands in court and cross-examines witnesses while wearing a black cape. Like a verbose Batman.

This odd combination of talents can lead to a great deal of awkwardness in our relationship, not least the fact that arguments can be unpredictable and extremely difficult to win.

To understand this story you need to know that I recently met Gillian Anderson. I'm not saying that as a boast (well, I suppose I am) but I'm telling you that important fact because she has been the catalyst for many temper tantrums during the past decade.

When I met my wife, she had a much bigger flat than I did, which meant it made sense to move into her existing property. Instead of both of us making a fresh start, I was the one arriving with boxes of photos and knick-knacks to be sifted and sorted into their new positions. While unpacking I found a picture of Gillian Anderson,

which I'd put in an Ikea frame and used to display on top of my television. I know. I was single for a long time.

On seeing the photo my wife asked me why I had it, and I, not thinking of the long-term consequences, casually replied, "Oh I think she's quite nice". And that was that. One small sentence that means every time Gillian Anderson appears on the television, my wife looks at me like I'm mentally cheating on her. I've tried to address it. I tried to reason with her that I hadn't meant anything by it, that Gillian Anderson was a prolific actor and if we carried on the way we were going we would have to stop watching television altogether.

I thought we'd reached an understanding until one night it became clear that she hadn't forgotten. I was out of the room, making a cup of tea, and my wife switched over to the BBC2 drama, *The Fall*. I know this because from two rooms away I heard her shouting, rather aggressively, "That's your girlfriend on the television!!!"

I didn't think our paths would ever cross in real life until I encountered Ms Anderson during a 27-hour comedy show I was performing in for Comic Relief. She arrived as a surprise guest, and was charming and funny and utterly wonderful. On seeing her, I was as cool as you might expect, if being cool means standing at the side of the stage, unable to move my limbs in her direction. The many nights I'd spent

SUSAN CALMAN MEETS HER OLD CELEBRITY CRUSH IN REAL LIFE

Every time Gillian Anderson appears on the telly, my wife looks at me like I'm mentally cheating on her

with Agent Scully in my 20s, imagining our imaginary life together, left me flushed with embarrassment. As she was departing I finally found some courage, ran towards her and asked her for a photo. It's fair to say that in it I look a little hysterical, like I'm holding her hostage.

I wanted to share the picture on Twitter and Facebook and get it tattooed on my arse, but then I remembered. I couldn't. Because if my wife found out, she'd never let it go. It was bad enough when she was just a figment of my imagination. What sort of rage would occur when my wife realised I'd actually met this mythical creature who has, in her head, been occupying a secret part of my heart?

I didn't mention it when I got home from the gig; I thought that pretending nothing had happened was the safest option. But I'd forgotten one thing. The show was streamed live on the internet and my wife, being supportive and lovely, had watched every moment.

This became abundantly clear when she turned out the light and gently whispered, "You and the second Mrs Calman looked very happy together. Congratulations".

I didn't want to watch the new *X-Files* series, anyway.

Busted. **D**

[susan@divamag.co.uk](mailto:susan@divamag.co.uk)



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# Holidays in the sun



My girlfriend and I have just returned from holidaying in an all-inclusive tropical resort, on an island

**SARAH WESTWOOD IS THE ONLY GAY IN THE HOLIDAY VILLAGE**

famed for its beauty and the diversity of its flora and fauna. How excited we were, heading off for a week of sea and sun, coconut palms and hummingbirds, snorkelling and sandy crotches. We were looking forward to something different from our city lives, the perfect romantic getaway. Excited, we packed VG Lee and Patricia Highsmith amid our smalls and travel kettle and bid the cat a tearful farewell.

I admit, discovering via an idle Google search the night before that the island we were headed for was one where homosexuality is illegal and punishable by a five-year jail sentence had given us a moment's pause. Would our relaxing days in the sun end with a day in court? While other couples came back to find their rooms decorated with candles and rose petals, would we discover the local constable waiting to question us about the rumpled sheets on our double bed?

We never saw the inside of a prison cell, but nor did our resort turn out to be the hotbed of diversity we had, perhaps naively, anticipated. The other hotel guests were made up entirely

of straight honeymooners, dozens of them, paired up like pina colada-swilling, matching Barbies and Kens. It was like being on the ark, if Noah had put on a sunset cruise with pumping party tunes and a free bar. We missed other gay people.

It's hard being the only lesbian couple in such a romantic setting, as you feel as though you're constantly photo-bombing the loving hetero couple from the Sandals' advert. They're skipping down the beach, hand in hand, kissing in the surf to the strains of Time Of My Life, while just in shot over their right shoulder we're reclining on beach chairs in our rash vests, flicking through the latest Sarah Waters novel.

The prevalence of hetero couples threw something else into sharp relief: we weren't pulling off the femme beach-chic realness we'd thought we were. As the sun-beds around us began to fill up with the honeymoon couples, my girlfriend nudged me. "We're the only women here wearing shorts!" By Ellen, she's right! It seems the straight folk have a rigidly-gendered approach to beachwear. In short: he wears the shorts. The women are all wearing a kind of decorative lacy mini-dress, or designer "bikini doily". It's all about context and at this pool we were seriously butch.

It's easy to forget what it feels like to be a conspicuous lesbian, living as

I do in a north London bubble. In our holiday village, however, we stuck out like two particularly sunburnt sore thumbs, and I speak as someone who once carried a John Lewis gingham draft excluder into an All Saints store, so I know a thing or two about feeling conspicuous. You've just got to brazen it out.

The difficulty is that while you're trying to feel comfortable with your status as the hotel's best politely discrete gay couple, those around you are mucking it up. Later that night, the air heavy with the scent of bougainvillea and deep fried mahi-mahi, I wander over the bar to order us a couple of romantic Rum Daze. "Sisters?" Sorry? The bar tender gestures at my girlfriend and yells over the strains of calypso, "You must be sisters?" The band weren't the only ones off-key.

I've realised there's a life-cycle for the undercover lesbian couple on holiday. In your 20s you're less conspicuous, a couple of good chums on the pull. In your 30s you might be accompanying a jilted friend on her honeymoon, but in your 40s you're routinely mistaken for tragic spinster sisters. I'm actually looking forward to holidaying in our twilight years, by which time people will probably think we're a couple of recent widows and, out of respect, save us a nice pair of sun loungers in the shade. **Q**

**It's hard being the only lesbian couple in such a romantic setting**



# ON HOW LIFE IS...

SIT BACK AND ENJOY THE RIDE AS GABE, YOUR FRIENDLY NEIGHBOURHOOD LESBIAN, NAVIGATES THE HIGHWAYS AND BYWAYS OF LIFE. YEAH... SHE MAY NEED A LITTLE HELP.









## MEDIAWATCH WITH CARRIE LYELL

### WHAT A TIME TO BE ALIVE...



It's been a big month for the LGBT community. Not only did Ireland make history by becoming the 18th country to legalise same-sex marriage (and the first to do so by the popular vote), but Caitlyn Jenner also revealed her true self in the most spectacular way possible, teaching us all (but mainly Kim Kardashian) a lesson in breaking the internet. These two events have a couple of things in common. Not only were they both trending on Twitter for several weeks, but the response was overwhelmingly positive and, for a time, it felt like our often fractious community was united. Solidarity, finally, between L, G, B and T. What a time to be alive, am I right? Well, maybe not. Because another big story this month was UKIP's inclusion in and subsequent ban from the Pride In London parade – a contentious subject that has us divided. For some, UKIP's involvement is no different to that of any other political party or corporate organisation taking part and while part of me agrees, I think it's important to recognise that even if companies, for example, have a chequered past, very few remain openly hostile to non-white, non-British and non-heterosexual people and we need to think about what this says to members of our community – particularly BME LGBT people, those from migrant communities and HIV+ people – about their value.

What was that about solidarity?

@Seej

ALISON CAMPS, PRIDE IN LONDON'S DIRECTOR OF MARKETING AND ADVERTISING, AND PHYLL OPOKU-GYIMAH, EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR OF UK BLACK PRIDE

**What have been your personal Pride highlights over the years?**

**ALISON:** So many highlights... standing on the stage in Trafalgar Square surveying a sea of happy faces, all enjoying being – for once – in the majority; introducing Martina Navratilova and Clare Balding to a highly excited room of hundreds of (mainly) women; but, more than anything, the friendships I've made with some truly wonderful people.

**PHYLL:** Wow. Now that's a massive question because I could just say all of it, even the challenges, because that's what's helped us grow. Beverley Knight on stage. The very first time DIVA covered it, because for me, being a very out black woman it was wonderful to have DIVA – this magazine that I thought was unreachable for many people in my community – record and acknowledge a Black Pride. And the trade union movement and Stonewall absolutely solid and supportive behind Black Pride when many other organisations were very critical.

**What are you most looking forward to about your event this year?**

**ALISON:** I am really excited about this year's Pride Arts Festival, where the team has curated a fantastic choice of different events for all corners of the community. Many of them are free, and all of them help raise money towards our £650,000 target.

**PHYLL:** I'm looking forward to seeing the crowd every time we have a performer from our community. It's always mesmerising to watch how people engage with each other, how people feel so comfortable about just being who they want to be.

**In a dream world, who would be on the main stage?**

**ALISON:** My fellow directors will point and laugh at me when they read this, but Taylor Swift. Supported by the Indigo Girls. Because I'm old-school.

**PHYLL:** Oh my gosh. There are too many. Diana King would be one of them, as a prominent black lesbian, Laverne Cox, Emeli Sande, Sam Smith... there's too many to mention, but they are key people that stand out.

**Why do you think Pride is still important?**

**ALISON:** Pride will always be important, even if and when the day finally comes that LGBT+ people around the world are all afforded equal rights, and have the freedom and confidence to exercise them. Pride gives us an opportunity to honour those who fought for us in London and the UK, to celebrate the progress we have made as a nation but also to draw attention to the work still to be done.

**PHYLL:** Pride is still very, very important because we're not all accepted in mainstream society, we're not reflected completely and wholeheartedly on TV or in magazines. Pride is still important because we've still got a long way to go, even though we've had major gains like repealing Section

28, and the Race Relations Act. And it's still important because there's an understanding that needs to be made about the intersections of being LGBT and black, LGBT and disabled, LGBT and a woman. That intersectionality needs to come through not just Black Pride, not just London Pride, but every single Pride.

**Why should DIVA readers come along and support these events?**

**ALISON:** We have more to offer women this year. And the more women engage – volunteer, come to our events, take part – the more we will be able to do in future.

**PHYLL:** It's inclusive, it's fun, it's vibrant and you're going to get brilliant food. The entertainment is off the hook, and the vibe and connection is so loving and peaceful. You can have your tranquil moment, your hype moment, your excitable moment, but most importantly, you can just have your moment without fear of being judged, watched or challenged because of who you are.

Pride In London, 27 June, [prideinlondon.org](http://prideinlondon.org)

UK Black Pride, 28 June, [tinyurl.com/DIVABlackPride](http://tinyurl.com/DIVABlackPride)



ALISON CAMPS

### 60 SECONDS WITH...



PHYLL OPOKU-GYIMAH

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ABOUT

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[aboutapp.lgbt](http://aboutapp.lgbt)







ADDITIONAL  
DIGITAL  
CONTENT

More information on p5 | [divadigital.co.uk](http://divadigital.co.uk)

# Legend in her lifetime



With the soul of Janis Joplin and the look of Jimi Hendrix, British-Trinidadian rock singer Zee Gachette has been blowing minds (and sound systems) since she first took to the stage with her band Z-Star. Miss her performance at London Pride at your peril.

**DIVA:** So, Music Worldwide described you as “the next Jim Morrison” and your band as “...the 21st century Doors” – how does that feel?

**ZEE:** I love the Doors, so it gives me a warm fuzzy feeling inside. I'd say there are elements of our music and live experience that are on the same trip... shamanistic psychedelic blues oblivion laced with visual lyrical improvisations, vivid musicality and incendiary stage-raging. Every inch of my being believes that music, especially when played live, should be a totally engaging experience from the band to the audience altogether in a rollercoaster ride.

**Who are your main musical influences?**

Nina Simone, Hendrix, Marlena Shaw, the Doors, Led Zeppelin, Chuck Berry, Muddy Waters, Howlin Wolf, Tina Turner, Betty Davis, Millie Jackson, Ray Charles, Miles Davis, Muddy Waters, Bob Marley, Alabama Shakes, Fleetwood Mac, John Martyn, Nick Drake, the Black Keys, Jack White, Gary Clarke Jnr.

**What made you decide to work with ProudWomen on the first of their live music session fundraisers for Pride In London this year?**

Robin and Lauren have been at the heart of the London scene, organising events and parties. ProudWomen promotes more visibility for women within the gay scene, so from that aspect I wanted to get involved. Music within the scene tends to lean more towards DJs and cabaret, so it was fun to rock out!

**What was it like to have the legendary Jimmy Page describe you as “a force of nature”?**

I was speechless and a bit in shock, as one would be if one of your guitar gods was giving you the thumbs up. He asked me if I wrote the opening track, Murder On My Mind, to which I answered, “Yes,” and the greatest compliment followed. The music of Led Zeppelin continues to be one of the major soundtracks to my life so just to perform in JP's presence

**DUBBED “THE NEXT JIM MORRISON”, DIVA MEETS THE POWERHOUSE ROCK STAR ZEE GACHETTE**

was a huge deal for me, never mind the fact that I was picking up the award for Best Live Act, so even more pressure. Afterwards I felt relieved in a way because when you admire such a legendary musician and then finally meet them, it's amazing when they are so down-to-earth and generous.

**You have an amazing stage presence – how do you maintain such mesmerising energy and focus?**

I have a very strong constitution, especially when it comes to music. The stage presence, energy and focus is part of my mother's DNA transferred from her father, my grandfather Al Timothy, a singer-songwriter, jazz music and cabaret entertainer. It's most definitely in the blood. As a live performer, it's my personal prerequisite to be always on form, embodying the message and energy of the music. If it requires me to scream until my chords bleed, that's what I do, live it note by note, truth by truth, channeling the spirit. It's the most liberating feeling to be at one with your path – I know who I am and what I have to do. Of course there are challenges, especially being on the road, lots of travel, lugging gear, waiting around, technical issues – it can get tough, but all the excess energy created in the struggles become gas on an open flame. As soon as I get on stage it's a clear channel and all elements for magic come together, preparation, expectation and delivery, the people, the musicians and the vibration of the music.

**What drives and inspires you to write music and perform?**

I really love it when folks identify with the message of the song, when the music truly moves them emotionally it's a beautiful exchange and I get to connect with them in this way. As an artist, I feel that's the true purpose. Most times I'm compelled to write about human experiences, inspired by reality or symbolism in a dream, or scenes from the vastness of everyday life. Sometimes it's like I can't move forward until I've written it out of my system and into a song or poem, the thoughts become fact, fiction or a form of therapy, a kind of filtering of the senses.

Apart from the creative side, other factors like global radio play, sold out shows, music on TV, cool collaborations and generally positive feedback,

helps to keep the drive on the freeway. Most of all, people inspire me: family, friends and fans, some of whom have met their life partners at a Z-Star gig, blissing out in a loved-up soundtrack to their lives, an infinite cycle of energy. That's inspiring. It's like coal for my steam train.

**Tell us about your recent tour of Australia. How was it different to touring the UK?**

What an experience for a first trip! It's definitely in my top three places to be on the road, the Great Ocean Drive being just one of my many lifetime experiences on our 20-plus date tour down under. The Aussie audiences are really open and into live music, adding to the high drama which just makes the experience even more crazy, fun and unpredictable. We were there at the end of summer, so lots of sunshine, which is great for outdoor festivals. The UK is definitely the tougher side of touring from that aspect, for everyone involved. It's so heartbreaking when the heavens pour so much so that shows sometimes have to be called off. And Australians still love to buy CDs, which is a definite plus for us independents!

**You recently raised the cash for your new project through crowdfunding – tell us about that and a bit about your new album, 16 Tons Of Love.**

We launched our crowdfunding campaign with PledgeMusic, which was very successful. It's definitely not an overnight job, it is a lot of work but then it's a great way to build on that direct connection to one's audience, which is a beautiful thing. We created artist exclusives, from signed CDs to art to videos and handcrafted items; in the beginning my imagination went wild and I added lots of choices which in retrospect just added to the workload, but I had fun fulfilling them.

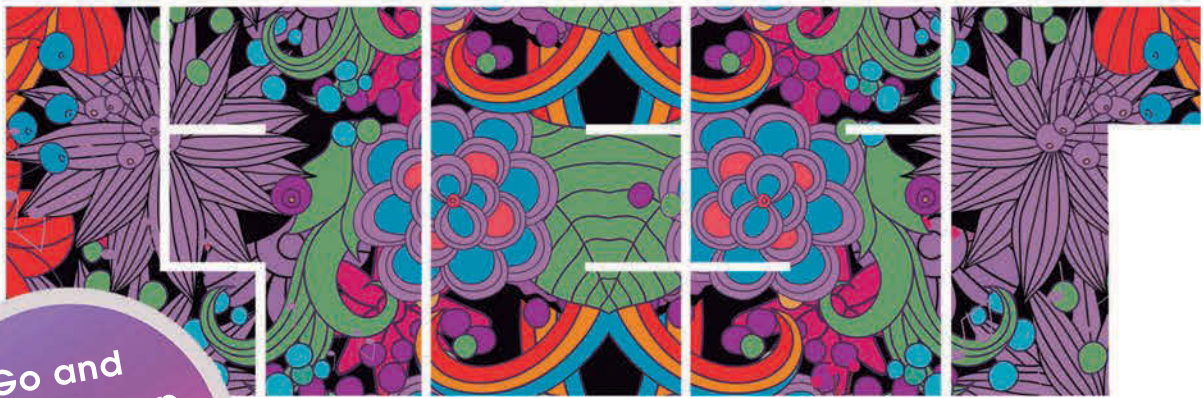
The forthcoming record, 16 Tons Of Love, is a return to my rock roots, digging deep into the foundations of my music DNA. It's bold 'n' bluesy, psychedelic 'n' soulful. This time round, I wanted to sing my lungs out over big grooves and loud riffy guitars so that's what's comin'. **🔥**

Z-Star performs on the main stage at Pride In London on 27 June 2015.  
[zstarmusic.com](http://zstarmusic.com)

“Some fans have met their life partners at a Z-Star gig. That's inspiring. It's like coal for my steam train”



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## ESSENTIAL WORLD MUSIC: SOAPKILLS

**BEST OF SOAPKILLS***Crammed Discs*

Between 2000 and 2006, Beirut's Yasmine Hamdan and Zeid Hamdan released three albums together as Soapkills. The 14 tracks on this essential compilation capture them reimagining classic Arabic songs as dreamy, trip-hop numbers that marry Yasmine's unique Lebanese vocals with dubby grooves, moody beats and slow-burning electronics.

**TERAKAFT***Alone (Outhere Records)*

The new album by desert blues band Terakaft is a deeply hypnotic affair. Skitting drums and handclaps provide the percussive rhythms to their songs whilst the Mali trio take turns chanting and singing in their native Tamashek. Sometimes their electric guitars drone and riff magnificently, other times they spiral and spiral.

## DOWNLOAD THIS

**PINEY GIR***mR hYDE's wILD rIDE*

Kansas born, London-based songwriter Piney Gir seems to have got the perfect balance between pop, tropical and lounge-beat on her sixth long-player. Gold Rules and Universe hook you in with chugging guitars and catchy choruses, whilst Wildfire and Keep It Together find her singing over fluttering keyboards and casino beats.

## IF YOU LIKE BON IVER

**AERO FLYNN***Aero Flynn (Memphis Industries)*

Co-produced by Bon Iver, Aero Flynn is the lush, panoramic, solo debut by Wisconsin's Josh Scott. Years in the making, it features nine sublime pop songs that see Scott crooning over psyche-folk harmonies, improvised acoustic and electric guitars, piano and beautiful, glitchy electronics. Seek it out.

SISIM



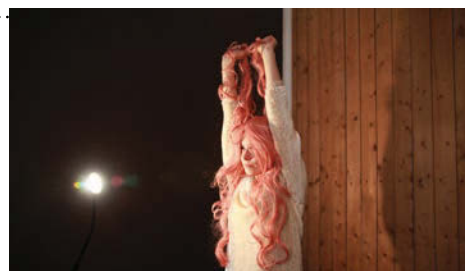
Channelling Plath: Kathryn Williams

**KATHRYN WILLIAMS***Hypoxia (One Little Indian)*

Kathryn Williams' latest album features nine songs inspired by Sylvia Plath's *The Bell Jar*. Beautifully produced by Ed Harcourt, it draws the listener in with intimate songs layered with gorgeous melodies, spiraling acoustic guitar and atmospheric percussion. Electric opens with Williams singing, "The muse is following me", whilst Cuckoo, Beating Heart and the dramatic Mirrors adopt some of Plath's most poetic imagery.

**GIRLPOOL***Before The World Was Big (Wichita)*

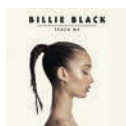
LA duo Girlpool channel the spirit of Lena Dunham on their ace debut album. All 10 songs last under four minutes and capture them singing witty verses about everyday quandaries over minimalist pop hooks, rumbling bass and guitar. Most are slow, lo-fi gems with occasional songs cranking the tempo and verb.

**JENNY HVAL***Apocalypse, Girl*

Norwegian singer and composer Jenny Hval follows up 2013's *Innocence Is Kinky* with another arresting and distinctive album. Catchy loops, beats and melodies provide a backdrop for Hval's improvised percussion, atmospheric FX and raw meditations on gender, feminism, language and the body.

**GEORGIA***Move Systems*

Kate Tempest's drummer unleashes this insanely catchy pop single with heavy drums, bass and fierce, repetitive pop vocals.

**BILLIE BLACK***Teach Me EP*

British singer Billie delivers six cool R&B gems with crisp beats, soulful vocals and lovely piano on her second EP.

**HAWK***Glass*

The Irish quartet builds slo-mo drums and ethereal vocals into a hypnotic rock number. The cool video celebrates the Marriage Equality Referendum results!

3 BEST TRACKS



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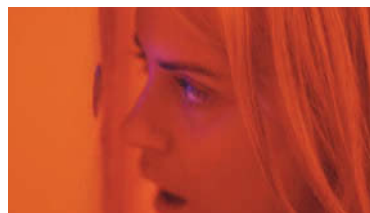
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## THE OVERNIGHT

Dir Patrick Brice



If you've already devoured season three of *Orange Is The New Black*, find out what Taylor Schilling, AKA Piper, did next in Patrick Brice's taboo-busting comedy drama. She plays Emily, one half of a married couple on a mysterious playdate with another family. As the evening progresses, Emily and Alex start to suspect that Kurt and Charlotte are interested in a more adult kind of friendship... Keeping the audience uncertain whether they're watching *Rocky Horror* or *Who's Afraid Of Virginia Woolf*, this nuanced take on intimacy is ultimately as silly and joyous as sex. And yes, Taylor does kiss a girl.

In cinemas 26 June

## THE WONDERS

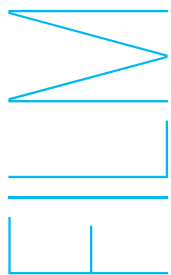
Dir Alice Rohrwacher



Only the second feature by director Alice Rohrwacher, this magical film about an unusual Tuscan childhood won the Grand Prix at Cannes last year. It follows Gelsomina (Maria Alexandra Lungu), the eldest daughter of a rural beekeeper, as she struggles with the life she's inherited from her fierce, beloved father and begins to dream of closer contact with the modern world. The film shares surprising details of the family's tough, threadbare existence in a fantastical landscape of caves and waterfalls, sunlight and bees, and depicts eccentric characters and changing household allegiances with a light touch. Watch out for the heartrending conclusion.

In cinemas 17 July

## ONLINE



## DEAR WHITE PEOPLE

Dir Justin Simien

In a year when the Oscars voting panel was 76% male and 94% white, it's no wonder Justin Simien's first movie tackles the problems faced by minorities in elite institutions. This slick, addictively-stylised political allegory is set at an Ivy League university, where black students discover it's impossible to just "be yourself". Strong, complex characters include Lionel (Tyler James Williams), who doesn't want to label himself as black or gay, and Sam (Tessa Thompson), a media arts undergrad whose radio show, *Dear White People*, offers a blunt response to the sly oppressions around her. Get inspired by a punchy take on identity politics.

In cinemas 10 July

### LGBT STREAMING BOY MEETS GIRL

Tired of the Gay & Lesbian page on Netflix? US-based online film library Wolfe On Demand offers global access to most of its LGBT gems. It costs about £2.50 to rent a movie, including latest feature *Boy Meets Girl*, a sweet love story pairing a transwoman and a bi-curious Southern belle.

Rent or download at [wolfeondemand.movies.com](http://wolfeondemand.movies.com).



### FESTIVALS GAZE AND LEEDS

Celebrate Ireland's landmark vote for same-sex marriage in May by heading to GAZE, Dublin's International LGBT Film Festival. In its 22nd year, the festival showcases the biggest new queer movies and work by local filmmakers. Or try the two-year-old Leeds Queer Film Festival for new and alternative cinema about queer lives.

[leedsqueerfilmfestival.co.uk](http://leedsqueerfilmfestival.co.uk), 16-19 July  
[gaze.ie](http://gaze.ie), 30 July-3 August

### BFI SUMMER SEASON LONDON ON FILM

See the capital captured over 120 years at the BFI Southbank this summer. We'd recommend the Soho Weekender in July, exploring the cinematic history of London's gay village. Plus, the BFI's free Mediatheques archive is updated for the season with movies including *Lido*, which centres on Brockwell Park Lido and a lesbian wedding.

Book for July-October at [bfi.org.uk](http://bfi.org.uk). (Soho Weekender, 24-26 July).

## ONLINE

### APP WHISPER

Whisper is the ultimate app to confess your secrets anonymously with no questions asked. No need to sign up or even provide a name – this app allows you to get advice from people you will never meet.

[whisper.sh](http://whisper.sh)

- VLOG
- **MY TWO MUMS**
- My Two Mums is a video blog belonging to lesbian mothers Kirsty and Clara. Recently shortlisted for the a Brilliance In Blogging award, it gives an insight to LGBT family life and hours of entertainment.
- [mytwomums.com](http://mytwomums.com)

- SHOP
- **ORANGE GEAR**
- Finished OITNB season three already? Fill the hole with some retail therapy. Need a Porn-stache-themed mug? They've got it. Want to wear a Crazy Eyes t-shirt? They have that too.
- [shoporangeisthenewblack.com](http://shoporangeisthenewblack.com)





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## DON'T MISS KITTENS IN A CAGE



Based on the play by Kelleen Conway Blanchard, *Kittens In A Cage* is an unapologetic comedy set in a women's prison. Writer and director Jillian Armenante says: "It's bad girls, doing bad things, in bad places," and with cameos from some of Hollywood's finest, this is one web series you don't want to miss. *Kittens In A Cage* is streaming now on Vessel.

## ON OUR RADAR I KISSED A GIRL



We love the sound of this new four-part documentary from Tello Films featuring 25 queer women sharing their first girl-kiss stories. Sometimes funny, sometimes

heartbreaking and always moving, *I Kissed A Girl* is a wonderful insight into female sexuality.

Watch now at [tellofilms.com](http://tellofilms.com)

## NEWS GRACE AND FRANKIE



If you've already finished watching this delightful comedy starring Jane Fonda and Lily Tomlin, worry not, because it's back next year for another series. Executive producer Marta Kauffman (*Friends*) confirmed: "Two and a half weeks after we launched, Miley Cyrus does a tweet about your show, and they call and say, 'We'd like to do a season two.' So yes, there is a season two."

Coming your way on Netflix in 2016.

# NOVELS



It all makes sense: Freema Agyeman (left) and Jamie Clayton in *Sense8*

**PICK**  
OF THE MONTH

## SENSE8

After what feels like forever, the debut TV project from Lana and Andy Wachowski (*Bound*, *The Matrix*, *V For Vendetta*) finally launched this month and we're pleased to say it was worth the wait. *Sense8* is a gripping story of eight people from around the world whose lives are suddenly and inexplicably connected in a fight for their own survival, and as well as being one of the best things to hit screens in years, this dramatic thriller also does pretty well on the queer front too. Not only is there a trans character, played by a trans actor (Jamie Clayton as Nomi Marks), but *Doctor Who*'s Freema Agyeman stars as her girlfriend. Watch all 12 episodes in 4K now.

Netflix



## WE LOVE PRETTY LITTLE LIARS

Aria, Emily, Hanna and Spencer are back on Netflix for the sixth season of *Pretty Little Liars*, and we can hardly contain our excitement. Picking up where season five left off in Charles DiLaurentis' creepier-than-creepy *Dollhouse*, executive producer Marlene King has called it the "season of answers" and we're glad, because we've got a lot of questions, namely, who the hell is A, and Emily, will you marry us?

Netflix



## WE'RE WATCHING CARMILLA

Our favourite web series is back – but you knew that already, right? The season two premiere was watched 145,000 times in less than 12 hours, and they can't all have been us. This really is the best thing on the web right now, so fire up the laptop and make yourself comfortable for all new episodes every Tuesday and Thursday on Vervegirl TV's YouTube channel. Missed the first season? Clear your diary and catch up at your leisure.

YouTube





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FEMINISM / ACTIVISM  
**SLUTWALK**  
*Kaitlynn Mendes*

Born in Toronto in 2011 as a protest against victim-blaming, SlutWalk has since become a

global movement. This study examines representations of that movement and, specifically, the support it has received from mainstream media. A thorough text, this is one for students of modern feminist activism with an academic bent. Palgrave Macmillan, £18.99



FICTION  
**HOW TO LOVE**  
*Sally Edwards*

Young disabled lesbian Charlie comes out to her parents and heads to Brighton, university,

and, perhaps, romance. At just 90 pages, Edwards' self-published debut is perhaps over slightly too quickly, but Charlie, who has spina bifida, is a likeable character and her story's enjoyable.

Figtree Industries, £8.99



CRIME FICTION  
**THE DETECTIVE'S SECRET**  
*Lesley Thomson*

Bestselling gay author Lesley Thomson's accidental detective Stella

Darnell is back, this time in a shadowy mystery linking an unsolved case in 1980s London with a fresh suspicious death on the Underground. Stella and her very observant friend Jack investigate in this creepy thriller.

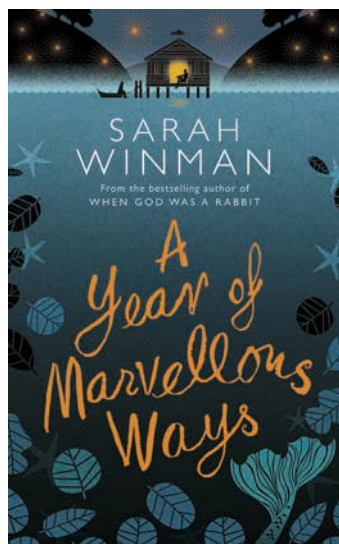
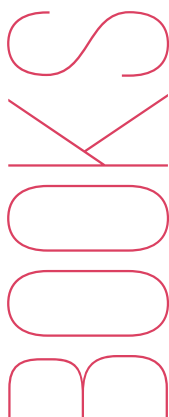
Head of Zeus, £18.99



ROMANCE  
**ARC OVER TIME**  
*Jen Silver*

The sequel to Starting Over follows the tumultuous relationship between archeologist

Kathryn and emotionally wrought journalist Denise. One for readers who enjoy conventional lesbian romance with lots of drama. Affinity Press, ebook £4.50



FICTION

**A YEAR OF MARVELLOUS WAYS**

*Sarah Winman*

After the tremendous success of her debut novel *When God Was A Rabbit*, former actor Sarah Winman is back with another finely-written story that puts the nature of grief and the power of relationships and of stories themselves at its heart. Set in London and Cornwall following the Second World War, Winman's second novel centres on an encounter between a solitary, story-telling 90-year-old woman, the *Marvellous Ways* of the title, and an

exhausted young soldier, Francis Drake, newly returned from France, who has made a promise to a fallen comrade to deliver a letter home. Less anchored in the real world than *When God Was A Rabbit*, *A Year of Marvellous Ways* is a rich and melancholy fairytale, a thoroughly poetic novel full of memories, magic and moonlight, fireworks and gleaming water. Fans of magic realism and folklore in the tradition of Angela Carter may want to pick up a copy.

Tinder Press, £16.99



PHOTOGRAPHY

**WHAT ELSE IS IN THE TEACHES OF PEACHES**

*Peaches*

Photographer Holger Talinski's shots of transgressive performance artist and musician Peaches capture the raucous essence of her fierce performances and gentler off-stage moments in this tribute to a "sexy", "fearless" queer icon. Fans Ellen Page, Yoko Ono and Michael Stipe explain their Peaches love in accompanying essays.

Akashic Books, £19.99

**CLASSIC SUMMER READS**

REBECCA, JAMAICA INN, FRENCHMAN'S CREEK – DAPHNE DU MAURIER

Get stuck into some classic, classy fiction this summer with Daphne du Maurier's much-loved novels, three of which have been released in beautiful new Virago paperback editions and as ebooks for £8.99 apiece.

As Sarah Waters has noted, *Rebecca*, first published in 1938, is one of the most influential novels of the twentieth century. It's a stunning, suspenseful story overflowing with great female characters, including the awful, snobbish Mrs Van Hopper, terrifying housekeeper Mrs Danvers, and of course the powerful force of Rebecca herself. Also in new editions

are *Jamaica Inn*, a gothic romance that often draws comparisons to *Jane Eyre* and *Wuthering Heights*, and *Frenchman's Creek*, a passionate, swashbuckling romance set during the Restoration and starring beautiful seafaring Lady Dona St Columb. Virago have also released versions of these three novels for the teenage market, so keep your eyes peeled for *Rebecca*, *Frenchman's Creek* and *Jamaica Inn* in gorgeous YA editions too, priced at £7.99.

Happy reading!

Find out more about new titles from Virago at [virago.co.uk](http://virago.co.uk)







# “An artistic duo in one body”

“Towards the end of my MFA at Goldsmiths, I developed a second self and his name is Gerrit,” says Mandy Niewöhner matter-of-factly. “He’s like my alter ego. He’s a really annoying man who thinks he’s a really good sculptor, which isn’t really true.”

Niewöhner, originally from the Netherlands, had gone to Berlin to take part in one of Diane Torr’s Man For A Day workshops. This is where Gerrit was “born”.

“In Berlin, he was OK. He was similar to me. But as soon as we came back to London, he felt he had to prove that he really was a man. He got this attitude.”

Gerrit walked into Niewöhner’s studio, tore down all her research

**DUTCH ARTIST MANDY NIEWÖHNER CREATES WORK AS HER ALTER EGO, AN “ANNOYING MAN” CALLED GERRIT**

**WORDS ANNA MCNAY**

work, got some concrete and began to sculpt. “I know it’s from my hands as well, because we share a body, but I just don’t recognise it as my work. I don’t do sculpture. I don’t know how to.”

Over time, Gerrit and Mandy have become more integrated and now she describes them as “an artistic duo in one body”. Her final degree show was produced by them both, as was an exhibition they took to Russia last October, *This Is For All The Queers*. “I did a performance as Gerrit, addressing all the gay people in Russia. I thought I’d be stopped but I had people standing around me, almost crying, touched by what I said. It was beautiful.”

Both Niewöhner and Gerrit work on the themes of gender and performativity, kicking against the binary system. “With Gerrit and me together, we’re already challenging it as we exist,” says Niewöhner. As for terminology, she prefers the term “queer”: “It’s all-embracing. It’s everything and nothing. After all – I can’t be a lesbian when I’m Gerrit!” **D**

Mandy Niewöhner has recently been awarded the British School of Rome Fellowship residency for 2015 and will also be included in the Bloomberg New Contemporaries.

[mandyniewohner.com](http://mandyniewohner.com)  
[dianetorr.com/workshops/man-for-a-day-workshop](http://dianetorr.com/workshops/man-for-a-day-workshop)





Previous page: Butch (32x26x27cm, concrete, 2014)

This page (clockwise): Gold Digger (145x90cm, photograph, 2015); Gerrit (20x20cm, photograph, 2014); God Bless America (20x20cm, photograph, 2013)






# PROUD TO BE ME

TOM  
DINGLEY'S  
PORTRAIT  
PROJECT  
CELEBRATES  
PRIDE  
AND LGBT  
IDENTITIES  
WORDS ANNA MCNAY

"When I was coming out," recalls photographer Tom Dingley, "I was repeatedly challenged because I didn't quite fit the stereotype. People would ask me if I was sure."

Dingley's photographic project #Outcome has the dual aim of breaking down these stereotypes by showing that there are LGBT people in all walks of life, doing all sorts of things, while also giving young people who may be struggling with their identities hope that "it gets better". His portraits show LGBT people with some attribute of their job or daily adult life, holding a photograph of themselves as a child.

"Having the child photo seemed a good way of showing the transition from being a young person to being an adult. That bit in the middle is different for everyone – some people have it fairly easy, others not at all – but the point is that everyone gets through it and you can be someone and do something with your life."

Dingley has successfully reached his first target of 50 portraits and will be exhibiting as part of both Pride In London and Brighton Pride. He is now aiming for 100 portraits and would like to do a book. He also hopes to use the photographs for pop-up exhibitions in schools. The project is growing and Dingley would like more people to volunteer to be photographed – especially women – so get in touch and help celebrate the diversity of our LGBT community! 

#OUTCOME – LGBT PORTRAIT PROJECT. TOM DINGLEY

@TomDingleyPhoto | [tom\\_dingley@hotmail.co.uk](mailto:tom_dingley@hotmail.co.uk) | [tomdingleyphotography.com](http://tomdingleyphotography.com)

#OUTCOME WITH PRIDE IN LONDON

New Bloomsbury Set, 22 June–28 July 2015

#OUTCOME

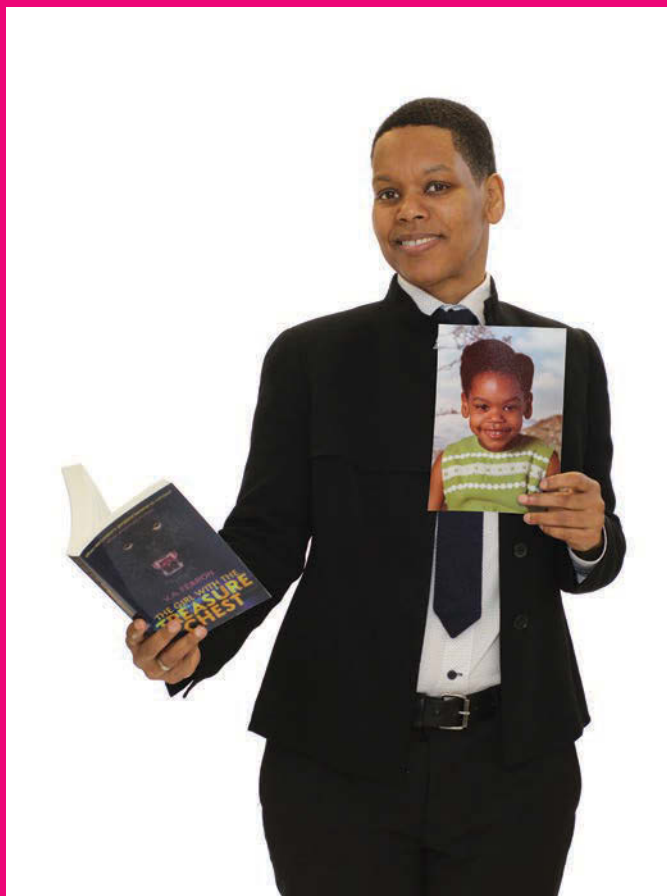
Brighton Jubilee Library, 17 July–10 August 2015



This page (top to bottom): Femi Otitoju, equality and human rights activist; Anna McNay, art editor, DIVA magazine.

Opposite page (clockwise): Veronica Fearon, author; Susan Hailes, Lewisham Metropolitan Police LGBT liaison officer; Katie and Naomi, managers at Ultimate Planet, lesbian guide to London; Cherry Potts, author and editor at Arachne Press, lesbian writing









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**ADDITIONAL  
DIGITAL  
CONTENT**

More information on p5 | [divadigital.co.uk](http://divadigital.co.uk)

| FEATURE | **DUSTY, THE MUSICAL** |



**Fame beckons: Ellie Ann Lowe (left) and Francesca Jackson as Mary and Nancy in the new musical, Dusty**

# EVERYTHING'S COMING UP DUSTY

Great news for all Dusty Springfield fans out there – roll up, roll up and get your tickets now because there's a tribute show coming to London's West End that you won't want to miss. Using innovative techniques that allow the audience to see Dusty as never before, the show combines film, 3D-technology and live performance to tell Springfield's story through the eyes of Nancy Jones – one of the singer's childhood friends – and others. Springfield was the ultimate female icon of the swinging 60s, known for timeless classics such as *Son Of A Preacher Man* and *I Only Want To Be With You*.

Springfield (real name: Mary Isobel Catherine Bernadette O'Brien) grew up in north London and developed a passion for music at an early age. Her distinctive brand of blue-eyed soul later influenced the likes of Amy Winehouse, Duffy and Joss Stone. During the 60s she climbed to success, topping the charts around the world, while keeping her relationships with

**A NEW SHOW  
CELEBRATES  
THE SONGS OF  
SOUL LEGEND  
DUSTY  
SPRINGFIELD**

**WORDS ANISA  
EASTERBROOK &  
LOUISE CAROLIN**

**"Girls run  
after me  
a lot and  
it doesn't  
upset me"**

women on the down-low.

In 1970, she told the *Evening Standard*: "I don't go leaping around to all the gay clubs but I can be very flattered. Girls run after me a lot and it doesn't upset me. It upsets me when people insinuate things that aren't true. I couldn't stand to be thought of as a big butch lady. But I know that I'm as perfectly capable of being swayed by a girl as by a boy. More and more people feel that way and I don't see why I shouldn't". This was a bold statement for the time; coming from a female star with a career to maintain it was particularly brave.

The hits dried up during the 70s, and her star status duely waned, but in 1987 Dusty agreed to record a duet with gay duo The Pet Shop Boys, and the single *What Have I Done to Deserve This?* resurrected her career by becoming her biggest hit in the US. Springfield died of breast cancer in 1999, at the tragically early age of 59, but her legacy lives on in her much-loved songs.

Co-writer Duncan Sibbald told DIVA what to expect from *Dusty*, the show. "The play leaves you in no doubt that Dusty was a lesbian, but doesn't labour the point. There are many scenes with Norma Tanega (Dusty's first serious girlfriend)," he said. "The show concentrates on Dusty's music but as her art and her sexuality were inextricably linked it wouldn't be right to totally ignore the personal side of Dusty's life. However the emphasis is on the music."

On her lasting appeal for LGBT fans, he added: "The play will certainly appeal to a section of the LGBT community. It has always been recognised, of course, that Dusty has a strong, although not exclusively, gay following and this undoubtedly arises out of an empathy with her lifestyle and the emotion expressed in her singing." **D**

Dusty is showing at the Charing Cross Theatre London until 22 August.

[thedustyshow.com](http://thedustyshow.com)



# QUEERING THE FUTURE

When Charlize Theron took on the role of Imperator Furiosa – the shaven-headed, gun-toting anti-hero in post-apocalyptic adventure *Mad Max: Fury Road* – she told the press it was because she planned to readdress the “misrepresentation” of women in Hollywood SF [science fiction]. It clearly worked, because MRAs (men’s rights activists) AKA misogynist trolls are up in arms over this “feminist propaganda” and demanding a boycott.

Once upon a time, SF was considered a niche interest, the preserve of nerdy, white, straight, cis men. But queer women have always been part of this realm, as both creators and consumers. For a long time, fantasy genres provided a space where we could express our outlawed otherness, either explicitly or with subtext. It offered a space where we could unpack and project versions of our hidden selves, dreaming up queer, feminist, matriarchal utopias while conjuring visions of resistance to salve our present-day oppressions and anxieties over the future. After all, what’s the point of creating futuristic worlds that reproduce all the same miseries women face in the now, while offering no hope for an alternative?

Nowadays, SF has been fully assimilated by the mainstream, and queer ▶

SWORD-WIELDING WARRIOR PRINCESSES, FEMME VAMPIRES, QUEER CYBORGS. SCIENCE-FICTION AND FANTASY HAVE PRODUCED SOME OF OUR MOST ICONIC TOTEMS. BUT WHAT DO TODAY’S FUTURISTIC WOMEN OFFER US, ASKS CHARLOTTE RICHARDSON ANDREWSON



ADDITIONAL  
DIGITAL  
CONTENT



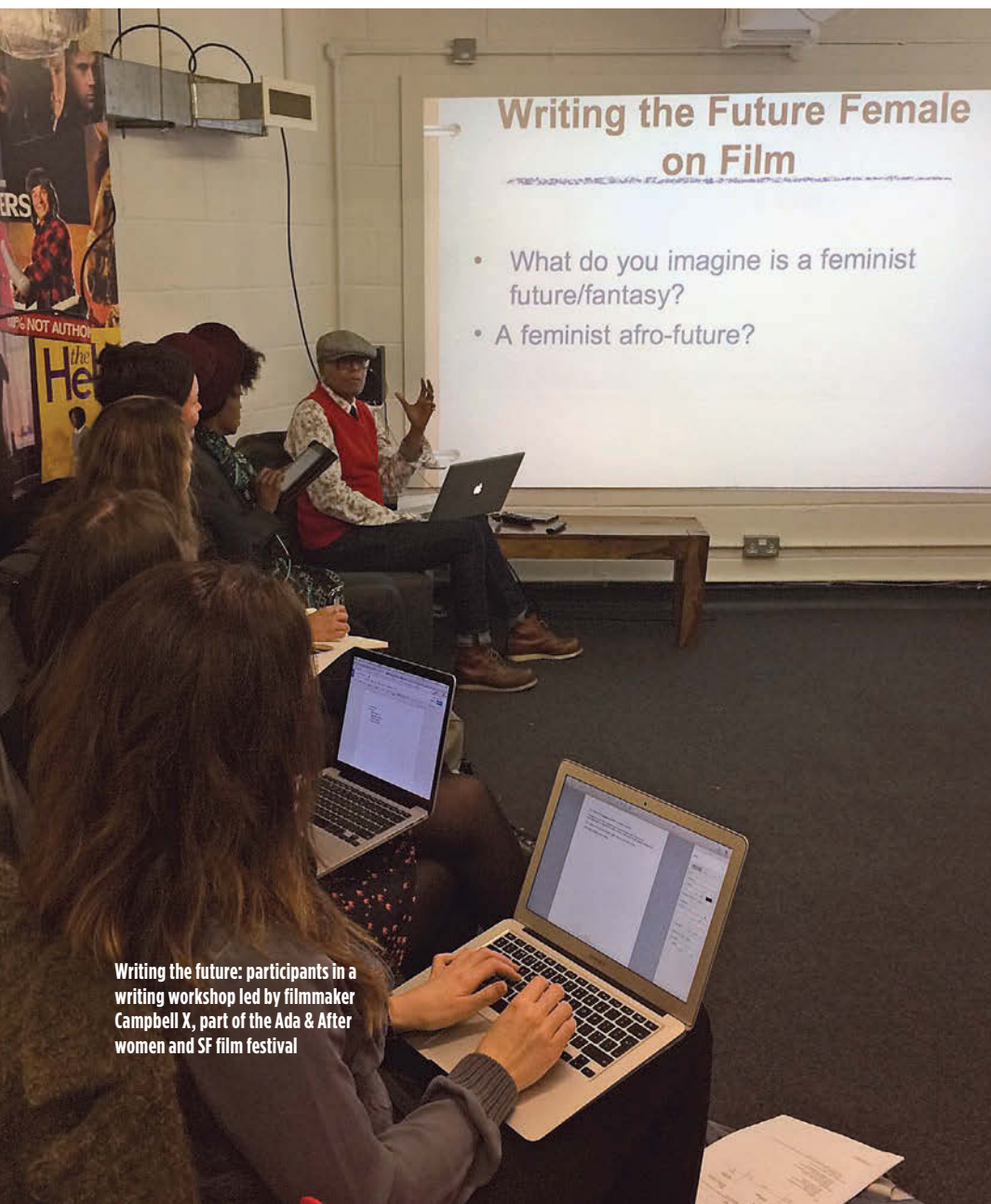
PHOTO JASIN BOLAND/WARNER BROS





**Girl power: Zoë Kravitz, Charlize Theron and Riley Keough in Mad Max: Fury Road**





Writing the future: participants in a writing workshop led by filmmaker Campbell X, part of the Ada & After women and SF film festival

women – characters and creators alike – are increasingly active in all its many mediums: film, books, TV, games, comics, the net. From Star Trek’s many queer aliens and Buffy The Vampire Slayer’s witchy lovers Willow and Tara, to today’s badass queer protagonists in TV shows such as Lost Girl, Orphan Black and Defiance – we’re here, we’re queer and more visible than ever. But what role does queerness play in today’s SF? And can SF still be a liberating force for women?

Absolutely, says adrienne brown, co-editor of Octavia’s Brood: Science

**"I love Gwendolyn from Saga: an openly bi, powerful female character"**

Fiction Stories From Social Justice Movements, and particularly now, given this increased visibility. With mainstreaming, says brown, has come a concerted push to normalise our otherness – “to pull us away from the margins and into the American dream – marriage, kids, house, dog, goofy jokes, strip malls”. Proving our common humanity to the homophobes in power was a necessary survival strategy, says brown. But queer SF can and must rocket beyond this. “We can still claim futures that expand what is possible for all humans – those margins

can be worked and stretched, what is possible can be transformed.”

A rise in queerbaiting – where media producers use allusion to reel us in with potentially queer characters in film and TV but never truly deliver on that visibility – has provoked anger from many in recent times. Queer SF women may inhabit the mainstream as long as we remain non-unthreatening and immobilised, points out scholar Sophie Mayer. “TV science fiction in particular remains committed to the solitary queer character, such as Helena Cain in Battlestar Galactica, who is often isolated, and even punished or scapegoated. I love Gwendolyn in Saga, for example – an openly bi, powerful female character. But she’s far from the centre of the story (which is about how heteronormative parenting will save the world). And that’s a pattern that repeats.”

Is creating and publishing independently, off the mainstream radar, the only way to circumnavigate this de-fanging of our queer SF selves? “I think it’s dangerous to ever think there is only one path or one solution to a problem,” says brown. “I’m really excited about independent work; I hope that some of our Octavia’s Brood stories get some independent film love. But there are also queer people, and those who love and see us, woven into the fabric of mainstream society – writers, actors, directors, producers, camera people. There are many points where we can intervene from within.”

This is true. But many prefer the freedom that working independently provides. Indie makers across all mediums continue to produce compelling, fantastic works, uninterested in profit or courting pop culture’s gaze. The Tumblr generation are particularly prolific in this respect, with whole communities forming around a variety of fan-led fiction (slash, fem) and queer, fantasy-based e-comics such as Witchy. In the print realm, Kelly Sue DeConnick’s Bitch Planet series – a sort-of Bad Girls in space – is leading the way, while in music, queer women of colour such as THEEsatisfaction and Janelle Monáe continue to produce thrilling sounds through an Afrofuturist lens. Women are also making huge gains in the booming world of games and technology. Micha Cárdenas, a US-based trans woman of colour, uses these mediums – in combination with



performance art – to liberationist ends, in projects such as *Becoming Dragon*.

However, these queer feminist gains in SF have provoked a multi-pronged backlash on our creativity. Ongoing sagas such as the #fakegeekgirl meme – where online trolls shame geek girls, claiming we “pretend” to be nerdy for male attention, #Gamergate – a mass, systematic attack on women in games involving rape and death threats, and the Sad Puppies controversy at this year’s Hugo Awards (a prestigious SF and fantasy awards ceremony hijacked by MRAs) indicate a ferocious push from male misogynists determined to stymie and crush the advances being made by women. “I offer the limited compassion I can muster for those who are being decentered, the white men,” says brown. “Why engage in SF if difference is so off-putting to you? The way we [women] navigate [these ongoing attacks] is to continue to create – to be prolific and brilliant, to lift each other up, to keep coming up with new and intriguing ways to present our work.”

While violent, male resistance to our creativity rages on, games and literature continue to prove fertile

ground for queer feminist SF – from pioneering stalwarts such as Tanith Lee and Ursula Le Guin to recent award-winning novelists Ann Leckie (*Ancillary Justice*) and Laline Paull (*The Bees*). brown’s favourite lit creation is Jewelle Gomez’ *Gilda*, the protagonist in a long-running series that offers a black lesbian feminist re-envisioning of the vampire. “In my mind, *Gilda* is in a cosmic dance with Shori from Octavia Butler’s *Fledgling* as queer vampires traversing white supremacy.”

Mayer offers a passionate endorsement of Octavia’s *Brood*, citing it as containing “the commitment to alternate forms of storytelling and society that went along with the writing of queer characters and lives in feminist science fiction, whether Le Guin or Samuel Delany or Nalo Hopkinson”. But that alternate vision has never translated from the book industry to the bigger economic canvas of film, says Mayer. “Hollywood fiction remains far more conservative than literature. Not a single feminist SF classic has been adapted to the screen – not a single one.”

Born In Flames, Lizzie Borden’s cult 1983 opus that features feminist militias and anti-rape squads, remains

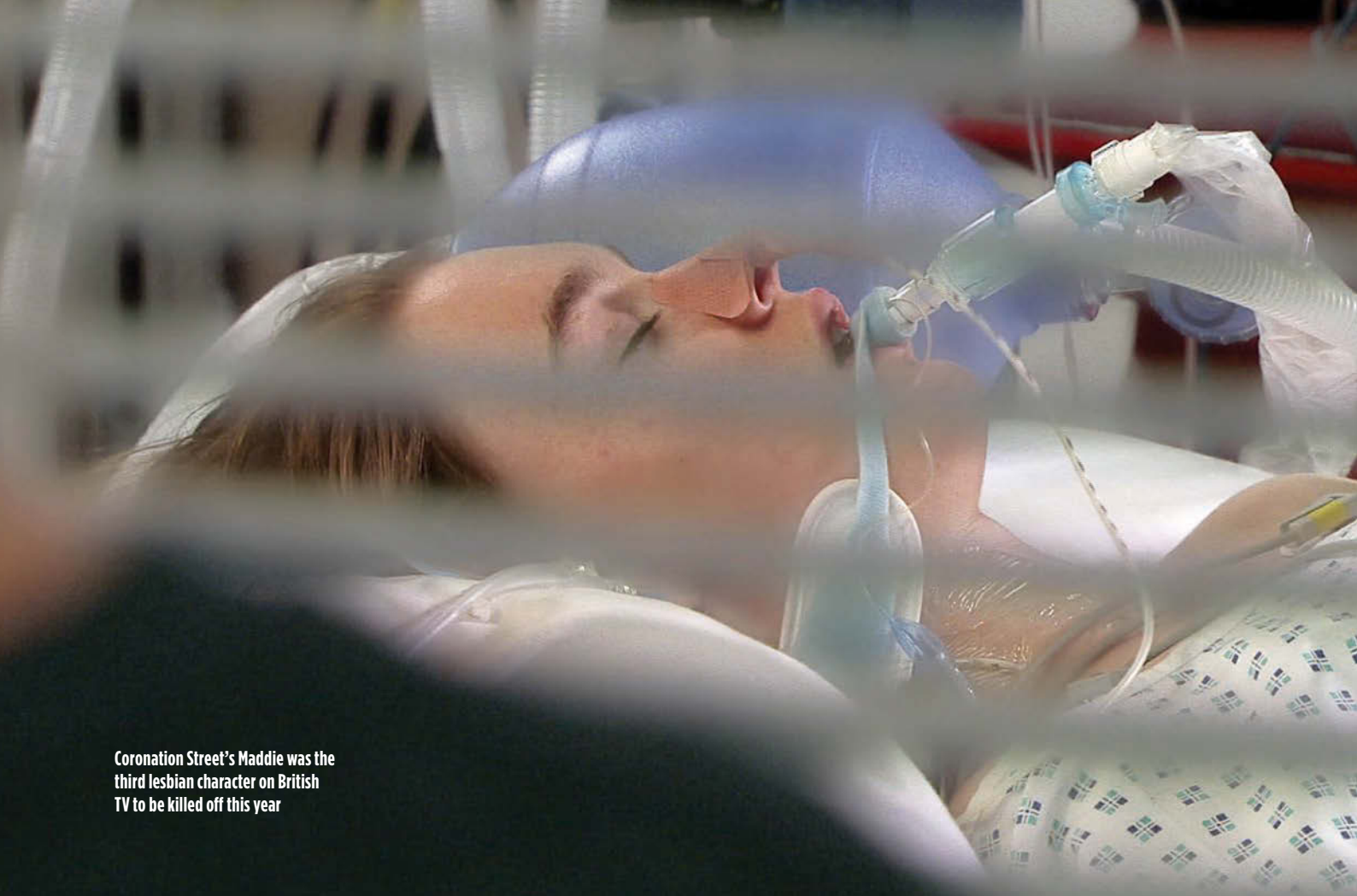
required viewing say Mayer and brown. “When Selina Robertson and I programmed *Ada & After*, a festival of women and science fiction in film (pictured, left), we found we had to cast our definition quite wide, taking in not only *Tank Girl* but also a documentary like *Future My Love*,” notes Mayer. “It was fantastic to be able to screen both *Conceiving Ada*, starring Tilda Swinton, and also *Codependent Lesbian Alien Seeks Same*, which both differently make use of their low budgets, imaginative special effects and queer feminist narratives.”

As Walidah Imarisha – co-editor of Octavia’s *Brood* – has pointed out, “utopia” and “dystopia” are ineffective terms when we use SF as tool for queer, feminist liberationist imagining: “because there is no true utopia if there are human beings there. We’re flawed, messy, complicated, sometimes fucked-up.” SF can still help us map out a better world, says brown. “But only if we shamelessly claim and embody what is not ‘normal’ about the ways in which we relate, love, raise children, change the world and build societies. The possibility is there – and I feel excited about what we can create.”

**Witchy**, by Ariel Ries, is a queer, fantasy-based online e-comic







Coronation Street's Maddie was the third lesbian character on British TV to be killed off this year

# RIP BETH, CAT, MADDIE, KATE AND MANY MORE

I have recently returned from LA, where I went to progress talks to turn my lesbian novel *Different For Girls* into a drama series. Given that it is set in west London, why have I opted to take it to West Hollywood? There's a simple answer. They asked me to.

Over the space of a few days I had a slew of meetings. One producer wanted to develop it into a soap opera. An agent thought to fashion it as an edgy, post-watershed drama. An actress fancied it as a vehicle for a comic/dramatic television movie.

However it might end up, this proactive leaning towards drama with specifically lesbian-focused content is as strong as the Californian sun, and is currently casting UK broadcasters into

**AS ANOTHER LESBIAN CHARACTER IS KILLED OFF, THIS TIME ON ITV'S CORONATION STREET, JACQUIE LAWRENCE ASKS WHY BRITISH TV EXECUTIVES ARE SO QUICK TO WIPE US FROM VIEW**

the shade. Recently GLAAD (Gay And Lesbian Alliance Against Defamation) extended the number of nominees in its media awards television categories from five to 10, "in recognition of the sheer number of well-crafted LGBT characters we now see in regular and recurring roles".

Conversely, British television is killing off its lesbians or, in a story-line that parodies a scene from *The Killing* Of Sister George, knocking them off their bikes and leaving them for dead. If you factor in the death of Cat, a major character in *Lip Service*, then that's three BBC lesbian road accidents in as many years. Over on ITV, *Coronation Street*'s recent dramatic twist left two characters dead, one of whom was

a lesbian. Pundits refer to this as the "lesbian death cliché". I prefer to call it "lesbian roadkill".

Meanwhile, lesbian drama in the US is alive and kicking. According to US television critic Heather Hogan, this wave of lesbian-themed television means, "over 120 lesbian/bi/queer women on television are spread evenly across genres, networks and age demographics". Compare that to the diminishing number of lesbians in current British dramas and soaps, and you'll be ordering US box-sets in bulk.

My own personal audit indicates a steady decline in lesbian drama in the UK since the axeing of *Lip Service* in 2010, with (in my estimation) only nine shows featuring a lesbian storyline.



The BBC, despite its proclivity for sending lesbians to Accident and Emergency, has shown seven of these.

BBC1 controller Charlotte Moore says: "The BBC has a rich history of lesbian dramas including *Lip Service*, *Tipping The Velvet* and *Fingersmith* and I would welcome more lesbian characters, subject matter and perspectives. I want to ensure that there is diversity running through all our dramas."

This is good news but there is some catching up to do. Even allowing for the more fragmented market and multitude of American television channels, there appears to be a staggering 56 US shows featuring lesbian storylines, most of them commissioned in the wake of *The L Word*. It is as if US television has embraced lesbians since its first lesbian-specific drama, whilst British TV has well and truly dumped us since ours. Why is this?

My LA-based producing partner, Hazel Steward, thinks that American lesbian talent is crucial to the rise of American lesbian television. Leading show runners like Ilene Chaiken (*The L Word* and *Empire*), Ali Adler (*SuperGirl*, *The New Normal*), Liz Brixius (*Nurse Jackie*), Liz Feldman (*One Big Happy*) and producer Lauren Morelli (*Orange Is The New Black*) are out lesbians. As Hazel explains, "These women are at the helm of big shows, and so it will come naturally for them to write lesbian characters and scenarios".

She also points to onscreen lesbian talent, who can command "first look" agreements with networks, whereby the network will allow them to develop personal projects, either for themselves or other actresses. Lesbian-themed projects are a natural for these women – for instance *One Big Happy*, executively produced by Ellen DeGeneres herself.

Actress Heather Peace, who has appeared in both lesbian-specific shows and more mainstream dramas, explains, "We need more visible lesbian producers and writers in the UK, working from the inside out, to weave lesbian narratives into our British drama. Because it can work, for instance when the women behind *Shed Media* seamlessly introduced lesbian characters into mainstream British drama like *Footballers' Wives*, *Bad Girls* and, of course, *Waterloo Road*".

Hazel Steward also thinks that the reason that lesbian-specific dramas

work in the US, is due to the amount of time given for the shows to embed and connect with the audience. I believe she has a point. The *L Word* ran for six seasons (70 episodes) whilst *Lip Service* ran for just two seasons, and just 12 episodes! It is not hard to understand that longevity is crucial to the development of characters and plot lines; and why it is frustrating for a lesbian drama like *Lip Service* to be cancelled just as it was finding its feet.

I asked Michelle Abbott, co-creator of *The L Word*, how easy it was to get the series commissioned in the first place. "Showtime was the first and only place we went. They said 'yes' straight away. They had done *Queer As Folk* and queer drama was in the zeitgeist. Lesbians weren't scary any more," she told me.

Surprisingly, some of those who had less faith were lesbians in the industry. Michelle laughs: "We had one lesbian actress come to the casting – she brought us dental dams – and said: 'Good luck with that but I could never audition 'cause I'd never work again if I did a lesbian show.' Thankfully she was proven wrong, but hey thanks for the dental dams!"

How easy was it to get lesbian drama commissioned by UK broadcasters? Harriet Braun, creator of *Lip Service*, tells me that the BBC were actively looking for a lesbian show, so this was why *Lip Service* wasn't exposed to an agonising pitching process.

Johnny Capps, who produced Channel 4's *Sugar Rush*, says it was his, "fastest and easiest commission. It was an absolute joy". So is it harder, these days, to sell lesbian drama to British broadcasters? Do UK television executives feel they have fulfilled their diversity remit with one or two series? I remember developing a lesbian drama in 2003, only for it to be cancelled when *The L Word* hit our screens because, so the thinking went, the British audience could only "deal" with one lesbian drama at a time. Interestingly, however, the same British audience is able to consume multiple police and medical dramas at the same time. There is, on average, a five-year-gap between lesbian-specific dramas on British TV, so executives clearly think a UK audience needs to have some respite before they can commission another one.

Charlotte Moore notes that the

BBC has shown simultaneous drama with high lesbian content, with *Last Tango In Halifax*, *Call The Midwife* and *EastEnders* all on air at the same time earlier this year.

Was this just a happy coincidence? Harriet Braun explains, "I don't think there will ever be a large number of shows that exclusively focus on lesbian characters. Drama budgets in this country are getting smaller and channels have to cater to, and represent, a wide audience. I also think, for the same reason, that ensemble casts are unlikely to have a multitude of lesbian characters".

Johnny Capps says the days of pure lesbian-world relationship dramas, are gone. He wants to see dramas "that feature flawed lesbian characters in strong positions of power, in the same way that gay men have been assimilated into mainstream drama; or been given complex mid-life crises the way Russell T Davies did with *Cucumber*".

Changes in marriage, family and fertility laws should be generating a richer lesbian narrative. No one is saying that lesbian dramas should be sex-lite, but perhaps they should move beyond the drug- and drink-laden hedonism that has provided much of the content in the past.

Hazel Steward calls this "relatable drama" and believes it sits at the hub of why lesbian characters are less transient in American television. The lesbian characters are "less fuelled by sex and sexuality and more normative. They are the nurse in *Grey's Anatomy*, or the young Afro-American singer in *Empire*, or the lesbian mum in *The Fosters*".

Harriet Braun, thinks that this is the way forward for lesbian characters in British dramas: "I would like to see more lesbian characters in drama, like Kima the cop in *The Wire*, where their sexuality is visible but is not necessarily the focus of their storylines. In exactly the same way that a straight female cop will be seen fighting crime onscreen and you will also have stories about their relationships. I think this is reflective of many gay women's lives today."

That can work for dramas with some form of conceit, like procedural crime dramas or medical dramas, but the problem with lesbians in, say, soap operas, is that they are so normalised that they become dull. ►

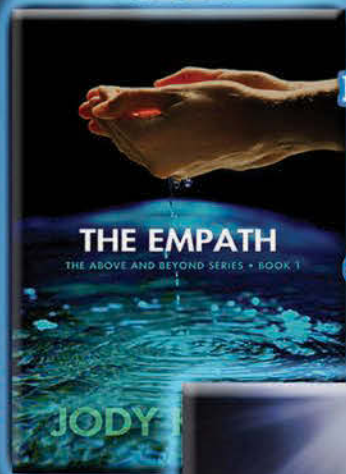
**"We need more lesbian producers and writers in the UK to weave lesbian narratives into our British drama"**



*'Fast paced, sharp and very, very smart.  
... promises to be a smash hit of a series.'*



## THRILLER



Runner up

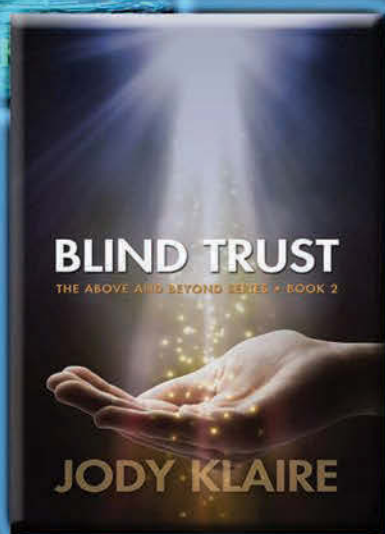
Rainbow Awards 2014

(Honourable Mention)

Finalist

GCLS Goldie Awards 2015

(Debut Author)



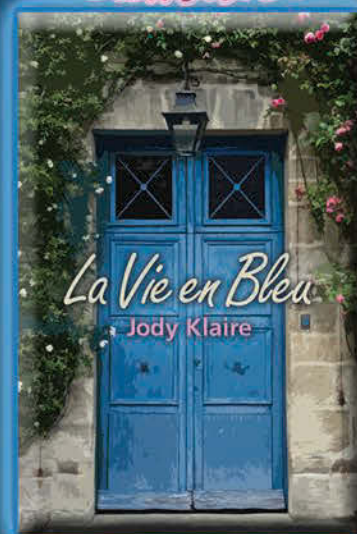
After six grueling months in CIG's boot camp, Aeron Lorelei is looking forward to spending some time with her friend Commander Renee Black. However, something isn't quite right with Renee.

When mother nature puts a mountain in their path (literally) and Renee does the unthinkable, it is left to Aeron to vindicate her. Stuck in a small Colorado town with only a few days to solve a mystery, saving her friend involves using the burdens she loathes and every ounce of belief she has.

When the danger lurking in the past reaches town, it is up to Aeron alone to stop it.

**SHE** Magazine

## Romance



Pippa Saunders likes her life as it is.  
Uncomplicated.

A series of events, which sees Pippa take a trip to the local Italian in her pyjamas, threatens to shake her neatly packaged life. As her best friend Rebecca describes it... boring.

Her fiance Doug buys a holiday home in the South of France and hires Pippa's 'old friend,' Berne Chamonix, Pippa finds herself face to face with the woman she's been trying to forget since nineteen.

...A woman who has an uncanny knack of tying her up in knots.

... A woman Doug wants her to work alongside.

Summer in France is poised to take a chisel to her well built up façade.  
Not so boring after all...

*'...A born storyteller.'*

Rainbow Awards 2014





Gone too soon:  
Kate's mother, daughter, wife  
and mother-in-law mourn  
in *Last Tango In Halifax*

Charlotte Moore disagrees: "Look at *EastEnders* – Tina Carter was in a relationship with Tosh, which turned violent back in October 2014. The storyline received praise from *Broken Rainbow* for highlighting domestic violence in LGBT relationships."

But there must be room for dramas featuring even less normalised characters, like those in Jill Soloway's brilliant *Transparent* and Jenji Kohan's sublime *Orange Is The New Black*. Not every lesbian has been an imprisoned drug mule or has a transgendered parent, but until there is a story that is as groundbreaking and as irresistible as these, it will be harder to grab the British broadcasters' attention.

According to Michelle Abbott, "Netflix and Amazon were smart to pick up on these. They are both sexually provocative with some of the other characters' stories too, so that coupled with the transgender elements would have made it a greater leap for the traditional broadcasters. But they

**"Lesbian drama is constantly changing. It is up to us as programme makers to move the debate on"**

are such huge hits, my guess is that the traditional networks will be on the lookout for equally breakthrough stories".

This seems to have energised Johnny Capps: "Lesbian drama is constantly changing and there is now a huge appetite here and in the US for risk-taking. It is up to us programme makers to move the debate forward. Lesbian dramas these days have to have a noise behind them, like a book or a personality. With *Sugar Rush*, the book's writer, Julie Burchill, was that noise."

Harriet Braun gives equally sage advice: "I think the answer is probably to get writing. I do think there will only ever be a small percentage of scripts commissioned that exclusively feature lesbians, but I think scripts that include lesbian characters and storylines have as good a chance as any others of getting made."

Perhaps the BBC's new police drama *Cuffs*, which features a lesbian

police officer in a leading role, will, ahem, fit the bill.

Charlotte Moore is certainly receptive to more diverse content; "I would like more writers, directors and producers to come forward from all backgrounds to better reflect the diversity of modern Britain, that includes LGBT, BAME and disability."

When I started writing this article, I had convinced myself that there wasn't a market for a UK adaptation of my novel. After talking to creative talent on both sides of the Atlantic, however, I am more enthused about putting it out there. We lesbian writers need to galvanise ourselves and not shy away from telling our stories because if Charlotte Moore gets her way, the future of lesbian drama on British television looks brighter. **D**

*Different For Girls* by Jacquie Lawrence is published by [zitebooks.com](http://zitebooks.com).

How do bisexual characters fare in TV dramas? Find out next month in our August issue.





# IS THIS BRITAIN'S TOUGHEST WOMAN?

Sting like a bee: semi-pro boxer Deborah Mills celebrates a win in the ring

PHOTO VANDAL PANDA PHOTOGRAPHY / IBC BOXING



**T**ough women are hard to find, but if you're Robin Barratt, it's a doozy. The author discovered over 14 when he lured them with the promise of inclusion in his collection of stories about Britain's Toughest Women. In his new book, Barratt shines a spotlight on female bodyguards, boxers, MMA and cage fighters, wrestlers, martial artists, bodybuilders and bouncers, in fact any women who live or work or play in a tough world or who have had a tough or challenging life and overcome their adversities through achieving recognition in their sport or occupation.

DIVA flicked through the book and found Deborah Mills, a lesbian who served two operational tours of Northern Ireland in the army and fought in the second Gulf War. As a close protection officer, she worked in Iraq and was in charge of the control room when the British Council offices were attacked in Afghanistan. She has also competed as a semi-professional boxer. This is her story...

**"I never intended to join the armed forces. It all started with me and my friend H going into an Army Careers office in Birkenhead for a laugh. We ended up coming out with an information pack and a parent's consent form to complete an application to join, as I was still only 16. I remember taking it home and telling my parents I was going to join the army. They signed the papers, but I don't think for one minute they thought I would ever go through with it.**

A few weeks later I was standing nervously at Lichfield train station waiting for a scary corporal to shout my name, so I could board a mini-bus and go to attempt my fitness and medical tests to join the British army. I remember one lad turned up in a tracksuit, and the corporal screamed at him, from about a millimetre away from his face, telling him to phone his parents to come and collect him, as he was not correctly dressed or smart enough to join Her Majesty's armed forces. The lad was in tears, which appeared to infuriate the corporal even more. I eventually got my name called out and froze as the corporal assessed whether I was correctly dressed. I had on one of my dad's shirts and a pair of school trousers and blazer, but it worked and I made it on to

the mini-bus.

I passed the medical, and all parts of the fitness test apart from the upper body strength test – four assisted heaves; where you start in the sitting position on the floor, then lift your upper body so that your chest touches the beam, your legs raise in a vertical position but your feet remain on the floor. When I was called in for my final interview, the officer in command told me I had failed my assessment and would have to come back in six months' time. I was devastated. I felt so deflated and, as I returned home on the train that afternoon, I thought to myself, 'You can do this, Deb, get training on your upper body strength and go back in six months and pass with flying colours'.

And that's exactly what I did. On 24 April 1997, I was sworn in under oath to the Royal Logistic Corps and, a couple of weeks later, sent to Pirbright in Surrey to undergo 18 weeks' basic army training.

The first six weeks we were 'beasted' from one corner of the camp to the other, and taught the very basics of teamwork, and when someone didn't make their bed or clean the toilet with a toothbrush correctly, we were all punished. I made some really good friends during this period, and we helped each other through the hardest of days. It was real camaraderie; the majority of us worked hard together as a team and the ones who didn't either left because they couldn't hack it or they were chucked out because they just didn't make the grade. After those initial six weeks we were moved into the main accommodation block, and given a proper uniform instead of the lovely green coveralls we had worn since we arrived.

The following 12 weeks were some of the best times of my life; I grew more confident, I felt fit and strong and found that I was able to do things I never thought I would ever be able to do. I passed out of army training regiment Pirbright, and was sent to Deepcut Barracks to complete my phase two training, which included learning how to drive a car, HGV vehicle and HGV with trailer. I passed all of those and became fully qualified and ready for deployment to my first army unit.

I remember my last day at driver training school. It was a Friday and I thought I would be allowed to go home, before returning to Deepcut to be posted – I was looking forward to seeing my family and friends. I went to the

FORMER  
SOLDIER  
TURNED SEMI-  
PROFESSIONAL  
BOXER  
DEBORAH  
MILLS TELLS  
HER STORY  
INTERVIEW ROBIN  
BARRATT

administration building to hand in my pass certificates, but when I got there, they told me I would have to be on a bus back to Deepcut that Saturday morning. I was gutted. I had arranged a lift from one of the girls, so I hid in the boot of her car, and spent the weekend at home after all. Monday morning was spent being quick-marched around the camp.

Fast-forward a month and I had arrived at 617 Headquarter Squadron, Seven Transport Regiment, Bielefeld, Germany, and was about to embark on the most drunken years of my life. I should have known what was to come when, that very first night, I was told to present myself in the squadron bar to be initiated; I had to stand on a table and recite the phonetic alphabet, whilst drinking a yard of beer and three pints of traffic-light-coloured drinks. I made it through, but funnily enough don't remember much more of that night.

During my four years based in Bielefeld, I served two operational tours of Northern Ireland, was on exercise Saif Sareea in Oman, and went on a football tour of America with the British army women's football team.

One of the things I do recall clearly from my time in Germany is how I cheated death. Along with a few other girls, I was due to go to the UK to represent the regiment in basketball but, at the very last minute, was told I couldn't go as I was going on a training exercise with the squadron. I was gutted; I was looking forward to going to the UK for a week. A few days later we learned that there had been a road traffic accident; three of the girls had died and four were seriously injured. RIP girls – gone but never forgotten.

After four years in Germany, I felt it was time to come back to the UK and asked for a posting back in England, where I was attached to 33 Field Hospital in Gosport, Hampshire. I had been promoted to Lance Corporal in Germany, so my post was in a small, five-strong Royal Logistic Corps detachment, where my role was to co-ordinate and lead on radio communications. It was in this posting that every soldier's wish came true for me; I got the opportunity to deploy to Iraq and fight for queen and country in the second Gulf War.

We arrived in Kuwait in early March, about two weeks before war was actually officially declared on 20 March 2003. It was quite surreal at first, as the missiles started getting fired at us ▶

**"I never intended to join the armed forces. I only went into the Army Career office for a laugh"**

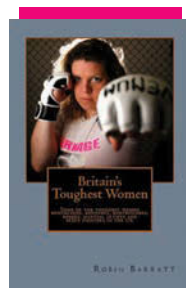




Former soldier and bodyguard Deborah (shown here with niece Chloe, right) now runs an amateur boxing club

and we would go through the drill of donning our respirators and NBC suits and getting into cover in the trenches. But, as the days passed, it became the norm and the temptation to stay in bed after the alarms sounded continuously throughout the night became stronger.

I remember one particular attack very clearly; we had all been moved from the trenches to a chemical protection tent, as there was concern one of the missiles had been a chemical weapon. As we all sat and waited for the 'all clear' to be given, I noticed a young female officer next to me struggling for breath in her respirator. As we didn't know whether the missile had been a chemical one or not, I immediately thought, 'Shit, is this it, she's contaminated'. As she continued to struggle for breath, she was showing all the potential signs that we had been hit by a chemical weapon and I remember thinking, 'Don't panic, stay calm'. It seemed like forever, but it was only seconds, until the Regimental Sergeant Major came over, lifted off his own respirator, and tended to the young officer. We all gasped as we thought he would immediately start to feel the effects of a chemical weapon attack and were relieved when, through gasping breaths, she said she was having an asthma attack and needed her inhaler.



**Britain's Toughest Women** is available in paperback, £9.99 and Kindle, £3.99. Available from [Amazon.co.uk](http://Amazon.co.uk) and [RobinBarrattPublishing.com](http://RobinBarrattPublishing.com).

I was deployed on Operation Iraqi Freedom for approximately three months. It was a real wartime experience, and one I will never forget; it taught me the fundamentals of coping in extreme hostile situations and how camaraderie and friendship can get you through the toughest of times. But one thing I never really considered at that time was the impact me being at war had on my parents and family; every time a missile was fired or a bomb dropped I knew I was fine, but my parents and family had to endure the television news bulletins and await that dreaded phone call. Most of my working career has been in hostile environments, and my parents, family and partner have had to re-live those feelings of fear over and over again.

After two years and four months I had finally come to the end of my service and, with only two days left in Her Majesty's armed forces, made the decision to leave the army. The main reason was that I had met Jemma, the love of my life, who was a civilian living back in Liverpool, and I was sick of being away from her all the time. Also, I was plagued with a football injury that had resulted in my anterior cruciate ligament being reconstructed. I knew that if I stayed in the army, I would be medically downgraded for a long time

whilst I recovered, which would affect my promotion and career prospects. Plus, to be honest, I'd really just had enough of being told where to go and what to do, and I wanted to be just more than a number.

I was due to leave Sandhurst as a civilian on Thursday 7 July 2005, making my way from Sandhurst station to Reading, and then on to London Paddington in order to get the Underground to Euston around 0900, but a dental appointment on my final medical had put me back a day; I was suffering from toothache which turned out to be an abscess on a root canal filling and I had the opportunity of getting the tooth removed on Friday morning, so I decided to stay the extra day and get the tooth sorted.

I don't think I need to highlight what happened in London on that Thursday, particularly on the Paddington-bound train that morning – it was the United Kingdom's first suicide attack and the worst terrorist attack since the Lockerbie bombings in 1988. God rest every soul that died that day and to all the survivors who live each day; you are all heroes in my eyes and I hope each day gets a little easier for you. I count myself very lucky that I have somehow managed to avoid potentially life-threatening events and, especially after the London bombings, have always wondered whether these events shaped my future career choices. Did I like to play devil's advocate because of my longing for a job with excitement and an element of danger? Was it because I had avoided those two key events where my life could have ended – the London bombings and the vehicle crash – that I felt I was invincible?

After leaving the army, I spent the first two years as a civilian working for a predominantly ex-military company with disaffected and disadvantaged children aged nine to 15 years old in primary and secondary schools across Merseyside. It was an enjoyable job, and I actually earned more money than I did as a corporal in the army, but I got bored as I was pretty much doing the same thing every day. I enjoyed working with the more 'hard to reach' kids but even if he or she goes to school and is given the right attention and guidance to do well, if they then go home to parents who don't really care about them, you're fighting a losing battle.

In May 2007, I attended a first aid



instructor course and met a couple of lads working in close protection. They had worked in Iraq as private security contractors, and as we chatted about what they had done and the money they earned, I started thinking, "I could do that". When I got home I had a chat with Jem and asked her what she thought. Jem has always supported me through absolutely everything I have achieved in my life and, although I've taken her to hell and back, she's always been there to encourage and support me in whatever choices I've made. So in October 2007 I touched down in Erbil, Northern Iraq, as a close protection operator for the British Consulate Office.

The 18 months I spent there were very quiet; it was more of a residential security role, we were based in a hotel and rarely went out. Eventually I jumped at the chance of 'getting some action' when a vacancy appeared in Afghanistan at one of the biggest British Embassies in the world and by January 2009 I was driving around Kabul, taking diplomats and other governmental staff to locations for meetings and their day-to-day business. It was fast-paced, dangerous and exciting, and everything I longed for in a job. This first stint in Afghanistan only lasted a little under six months and I returned to the UK for a while, but it wasn't long before I was back en route to Afghanistan. This time, however, it was going to be a lot more than I bargained for, and I was really going to experience the toughest times of my life and career.

The flight from Manchester to Dubai was a really bumpy one, so I wasn't looking forward to boarding Safi Airways from Dubai to Kabul, as that journey was always like a roller-coaster, but I managed to meet up with a few of the lads I'd previously served with, so it was good to have company on the way in. This time it had been particularly hard leaving Jem, and I was feeling low, but I tried to focus on just getting the first nine-week rotation out of the way, and using the money to get rid of our final few debts. When I first thought of doing close protection in the Middle East, I made a promise to myself not to do any more than five years, as it was so easy to get stuck in that world, constantly spending the money earned on expensive holidays and not really planning for any future. I too had fallen victim to this mindset during those first three years and foolishly blew all the money I

had earned. I lived each day as it came, not really knowing which one would be my last.

The next event that unfolded in Afghanistan, on 19 August 2011, really changed my whole outlook on working in the Middle East, and it finally hit home that the danger I was putting myself was worth no amount of money.

I was working alone, running the embassy operations room. It was nearly the end of a night shift when, at 06:15, I heard a very loud explosion – our British Council offices had been attacked. A suicide car bomb had destroyed the compound wall and a number of heavily armed men forced their way inside killing at least 12 people. I received the initial phone call from a colleague who was in the Council offices and under attack, and I literally had minutes to try and respond effectively and to get as much support to him as possible, whilst still managing the ops room and getting the necessary staff to assist with the management of the incident.

Every phone was ringing and I had to make sure my actions were correct and swift. I tried to keep my colleague calm on the mobile line, whilst trying to make announcements and get the relevant quick reaction forces into action. It seemed like hours, but in reality it only took minutes before the operations manager ran in, and then other people started to arrive to assist.

The attack went on for eight hours and sadly we lost a few local Afghan security guards who bravely defended the British Council offices but who had been caught up in the first explosion, and a New Zealand special forces soldier who was shot during the eight-hour stand-off. It was the most difficult situation I have had to manage, and holding a phone speaking to someone hiding in a safe room, while terrorists tried to gain entry or blow themselves up, was the most daunting and emotional situation I have ever faced. Eventually we managed to extract my colleague and two clients from the safe room when, at the very moment they emerged, the battery died on his mobile phone – our only contact. I was so relieved to see him at the embassy later.


As the event unfolded, RPGs (rocket propelled grenades) were fired randomly from derelict buildings close to the embassy, where insurgents had taken up positions and were targeting foreign nationals. It was then that I re-

ally started to think that one day I might not go home. So I made the decision to finally leave behind my close protection days in the Middle East and return home to my partner and family.

I've been back in the UK since February 2012, and have worked as a security manager during the Olympic Games, responsible for security teams at Downing Street, St James Palace and other royal venues, as well as on short term contracts providing personal security. I also took up semi-professional boxing and, although my career was only short-lived (mainly due to my age), I managed to have an area title fight, which I lost on points to a very tough opponent, who is also a good friend.

I took up training for boxing competition while in the UK, after my first Afghanistan posting, and continued to train hard whilst out in Afghanistan. One of my most enjoyable experiences was meeting an Afghan boxing coach, when the then British ambassador took me along to a pre-Olympic event where I ended up sparring with a female Afghan boxer. We became good friends, along with the three other female boxers who represented Afghanistan in China when trying to qualify for the 2012 London Olympic Games. They were true, tough, strong women and I hope they achieve their dreams of boxing and living in peace. I still keep in touch with them and their coach, and am planning to bring them to the UK one day so that they can experience training in a safe environment without the threat of their lives being taken, just for doing something they enjoy.

I'm still with Jemma and am settled in a great management job, and run an amateur boxing club for Derry Mathews, a local professional boxer who will be a world champion very soon! I am also planning to write a book based on some of my experiences living and working in hostile environments. But, whatever the future now holds for me, I hope women will be inspired that a kid from Rock Ferry, Wirral, can go on to achieve and experience some of the things I have, and that they too will be motivated to go out there and live their dreams, whatever they may be.

Whatever life throws at me, I follow one simple motto, now tattooed on my back: 'To do one's best.' 

**"I lived each day as it came, not knowing if it would be my last"**

This is an edited extract from Robin Barratt's book, *Britain's Toughest Women*.



# Lez be honest:

## isn't it time we said bye to biphobia?

**G**reedy. Slutty. Confused. If Arielle Scarcella's YouTube video, *What Lesbians Think About Bisexuals*, is anything to go by, it's a wonder that more bisexual women haven't lost faith in the humanity of their sapphic sisters.

During her six-minute interview compilation, which went viral in 2013, Scarcella asks a group of self-identified lesbians about their views on bisexuals. To say the result was an embarrassment for liberal lesbians at large would be an understatement.

With sheer abandon, the lesbians featured in Scarcella's video catalogue the "failings" of the bisexual woman; her "indecisiveness", for example, makes her "less intelligent" than her lesbian counterpart, while her fondness for the phallus means that she's a fundamentally incompatible partner for any self-respecting lesbian: "I mean, she loves dick. That's a pretty big thing to disagree on."

Burn.

After asking bisexual women for their views on the matter, Scarcella concludes that although bisexual women *could* get annoyed with biphobia, shouldn't they just take the high road?

As a lesbian in a five-year relationship with a bisexual woman, I know

**BIPHOBIA HAS DEEP ROOTS IN LESBIAN HISTORY – BUT IT'S TIME TO MOVE ON, SAYS CYD STURGESS**

that my partner shouldn't have to be the "better person" in order to make our union work. I also know how little truth there is behind the video's pernicious stereotypes. I'm not worried that my woman will run off with the next Harry Styles look-alike, for example. Neither do I find myself fretting about her past relationships with men; I can wield a Black & Decker with the best of them. Even her love of *Lord Of The Rings'* Legolas is of little real consequence to our relationship. Which, in case you were wondering about the "promiscuity" part, remains simply between the two of us.

Blatant stereotyping aside, what I find most striking about Scarcella's video is the snapshot it offers into an under-documented part of lesbian life. If biphobia wasn't so accepted within lesbian communities, would those women have still been so eager to denounce an entire sub-section of society on camera?

Speaking to my bisexual friends (and I have surprisingly many, considering how rare Scarcella's gang think "real" bisexuals are), I found that they had encountered every negative stereotype mentioned in the video.

Holly and Joy, who are in long-term relationships with men, tell me how tired they are of hearing that they couldn't be bisexual if they had

boyfriends: "Lesbians say I can't possibly like women, while straight women think I'm confused. I'm not confused. I know it's normal for me to want both. Women feel right and men feel right," says Holly.

Joy agrees, adding that many people appear to be baffled about what bisexuality actually is: "I've had boyfriends who have misunderstood bisexuality [...] assuming I was bisexual in the past but straight now I'm with them. I've also had friends who ask me how I can be bi when I have a boyfriend, as though I was meant to have a small collection of partners, or at least one of each."

The belief that bisexual women are promiscuous appears to be one of the most damaging myths of all. Lottie, who is in an eight-year relationship with her girlfriend, agrees that the most persistent view people have of bisexuals is that they have an uncontrollable urge to have sex with both women and men, which leads them to cheat on their partners and get bored of relationships.

When bisexual people aren't being vilified for their excesses, however, they are paradoxically being rendered invisible, or their existence is denied entirely. This erasure of bisexual desires, particularly within communities that are supposed to celebrate



love between women, highlights some of the more insidious elements of biphobia.

Let's take the lesbian cult classic *The L Word*, for example. As an agent of legitimisation and societal change, we all know how powerful popular culture can be. Groundbreaking in many respects, *TLW*'s depiction of non-lesbian love between women certainly wasn't one of them.

As the plot develops through each of the six seasons, bisexual characters are slowly and steadily erased from the script. In fact, by the time we hit the season six finale there's not a single bisexual left. Oops, sorry, spoiler alert.

Although *TLW* initially championed its resolutely bi characters and explored the lesbian insecurities tied up with biphobia (Dana's fear that Alice's desire for strap-on sex could only mean that she missed men, for example), this only makes the subsequent erasure of bisexuality from the plot all the more troubling.

More recently, *Orange Is The New Black* continues the tradition of bi-erasure within popular culture. Although protagonist Piper is shown to have had a series of serious relationships with both women and men, her identity as a bisexual woman is never addressed. Instead, Piper is described as an "ex-lesbian" or a "straight girl", giving further credence to bi-erasure in popular media.

Bisexual desires are not only marginalised in queer plotlines but bisexual characters who become involved with men are continually depicted as "traitors" to the lesbian community, highlighting a fundamental lack of understanding about what bisexuality actually is.

To cut us lesbians some slack, however, this misunderstanding might be a little more forgivable given that each bisexual woman I spoke to defined her sexuality in slightly different terms. While some claimed bisexuality was the romantic and/or sexual attraction to both men and women, others believed it was the openness to explore encounters or relationships with all people, regardless of gender or sexuality. But, if anything, surely this only points to the subjective nature of sexuality and that we shouldn't be so quick to tar everyone with the same brush.

What's most interesting about the


subject of biphobia, from a historical perspective, is that the erasure of bisexual desires à la *TLW* and *OITNB*, as well as the lesbian agenda that discounts bisexuality as "fake", "slutty" and "greedy", have long roots in the historical struggle for homosexual emancipation.

Looking back in history, we can see how biphobia was employed as a tool by homosexual rights campaigners in the very first pursuits of legal rights for homosexuals. When homosexual communities initially began to emerge at the turn of the 20th century, medical experts distinguished between what they classed "pseudo-homosexuals", who were temporarily driven to homosexuality due to sexual excess rather than sexual difference, and those who were "congenital homosexuals" and, in the words of Gaga, born that way.

In attempting to promote a homosexual identity that had a biological basis, sexologists and grassroots campaigners were able to lobby against the laws that criminalised homosexuality on the grounds that true homosexual desires were congenital. The bisexual "pervert", however, was a temporary aberration resulting from excessive sexual activity or substance abuse.

It was believed that these temporary perverts were to be found in exclusively female environments, such as cloisters, boarding schools or prisons. Sexologists claimed that given the opportunity of financial and romantic security with men, however, these women would inevitably return to heterosexuality. It appears that the *OITNB* "gay for the stay" rhetoric has a much longer history than we might've first thought.

While the denigration of bisexuals as "promiscuous", "untrustworthy", and "confused" has traditionally served as a way of legitimating "real" lesbian identities, that time has surely long since passed. We no longer need (was there ever a need?) to promote our own agenda at the expense of others. Why should it be down to bisexual women to take the high road? Shouldn't we all strive to be better, more tolerant, people?

As one particularly pithy bisexual said in response to Scarella's video: We all love vagina – so, honestly, what's the problem? 

It appears that the *OITNB* "gay for the stay" rhetoric has a long history

## How to be a good bi ally

- 1 Accept difference between people and treat others with kindness: live and let love.
- 2 Believe that bisexuals exist: unlike aliens, bisexuals do indeed walk among us.
- 3 If a bisexual once dated a woman but is now dating a man, don't assume her previous relationships were somehow "fake".
- 4 Don't try to qualify how bisexual a woman is: if a bisexual woman is currently in a relationship with a man, she is still 100% bisexual.
- 5 Don't try and talk a bisexual into redefining her sexuality: you know it wouldn't work if someone tried to convince you that you were straight.
- 6 If you're at an LGBT inclusive event but don't see bisexuals being represented, ask why.
- 7 Don't believe that one bisexual woman represents an entire community: if you have had a bad experience with one bisexual woman, this doesn't mean that all bisexuals are inherently bad people. Imagine if someone judged you on their one awful break up *with someone else*.
- 8 Finally, speak up if you hear someone being biphobic or not inclusive of bisexual people. We all have a responsibility to encourage acceptance and inclusivity.





# Room to heal





In the UK, those of us who are gay, bisexual or transgender probably each have our own unique struggles around coming out and accepting our “difference”. We may have felt rejected by our families to different degrees. We may have experienced self-hate. Even those of us from very open and accepting families will have had to confront some societal prejudices. But we are the lucky ones. We were born in the right place and the right time. We live in a context that broadly accepts us. If someone abuses us because of who we are, we have the law on our side. We have rights. We can even get married (if we can find someone to marry us!).

The people I work with have not been so lucky. I’m a psychotherapist in a therapeutic charity called Room To Heal. We support people who’ve fled torture and organised violence and are living in exile in London. Some of our members were tortured because of political or religious beliefs, but a quarter of our members are gay and lesbian people who’ve been persecuted because of their sexuality.

Torture sets out to destroy a person’s body, mind and spirit – it dehumanises. On top of experiencing such devastating violence, the people we help have lost their families and homes, and then face further struggles in the UK. The hardest thing for our members to bear is often the experience of being disbelieved by the British authorities in the context of seeking asylum and facing the recurring threat of being returned to the place from which they fled.

Unsurprisingly, when people arrive at Room To Heal they are often in a state of despair. As one woman told me, “When I arrived I was a dead soul in a living body”. We say we help people “rebuild their lives” but what does this mean? In the context of therapy it means bearing witness to what they’ve been through, and acknowledging their courage and resources. It means standing with them resolutely as they begin to come to terms with what they’ve suffered and what they’ve lost. It means bringing people back into community and relationship. It also means helping people deal with the myriad practical challenges they face, be it getting a lawyer or a roof over their heads.

Becoming part of a community, finding a family that is accepting and safe, is particularly important for our gay and lesbian members because it’s often something they’ve never experienced. They’ve been attacked and ostracised on every level: by police and other state agents, by their communities and even their families. They’ve no allies, apart from other members of the gay community, who are also under siege. Unsurprisingly, having grown up in an environment where they’re constantly vilified, they’ve often internalised the belief that they’re “evil” or “wrong”.

While we rejoice in the progression of gay rights, like the recent approval of gay marriage in Ireland, it’s worth remembering that in many countries the situation for gay, lesbian and bisexual people worsens. There’s a long list of countries you don’t want to be born in if you’re gay – 78 currently criminalise

CHLOE DAVIES  
TALKS ABOUT  
A UNIQUE  
SMALL  
CHARITY  
MAKING A BIG  
DIFFERENCE TO  
THE LIVES OF  
LGBT ASYLUM  
SEEKERS

consensual homosexuality.

There’s a complex history behind this rising homophobia. Homosexuality is often denounced as a “western import” in countries like Uganda, but in reality it’s often homophobia that is the biggest western import. As researchers like Enze Han and Joseph O’Mahoney documented in a study last year, it was often British colonial governments that first criminalised homosexual behaviours. They conclude from their research that “British colonies are much more likely to have criminalisation of homosexual conduct laws than other colonies or other states in general”.

The documentary *God Loves Uganda* explores another important factor in the rise of anti-homosexual persecution in Uganda, the powerful influence of US evangelical Christian movements who, particularly since 2009, have invested heavily in the country, simultaneously propagating the message that there’s an evil homosexual movement spreading the “disease” of homosexuality to children and threatening to destroy the fabric of Ugandan society. The battle has been lost in the US, the argument goes, but can be won in Uganda. In the wake of this message, gay and lesbian people have increasingly been scapegoated for society’s ills – a pattern which may worsen in the context of upcoming elections in 2016.

At Room To Heal I witness daily the damage being done by this hate. One young woman, Lucy, told me how, as a teenager, her own father had taken her to the police station, because he found her kissing a girl. There she endured

“When I arrived, I was a dead soul in a living body”



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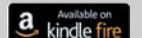
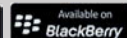
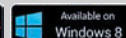
### BONUS DIGITAL CONTENT IN THIS ISSUE:

AN EXCLUSIVE BACKSTAGE SNEAK-PEEK AT REHEARSALS FOR DUSTY THE MUSICAL, A HEARTWARMING SHORT ABOUT LGBT ASYLUM SEEKERS, BEHIND THE SCENES SHOTS FROM THE SAMIRA WILEY SHOOT AND MORE...

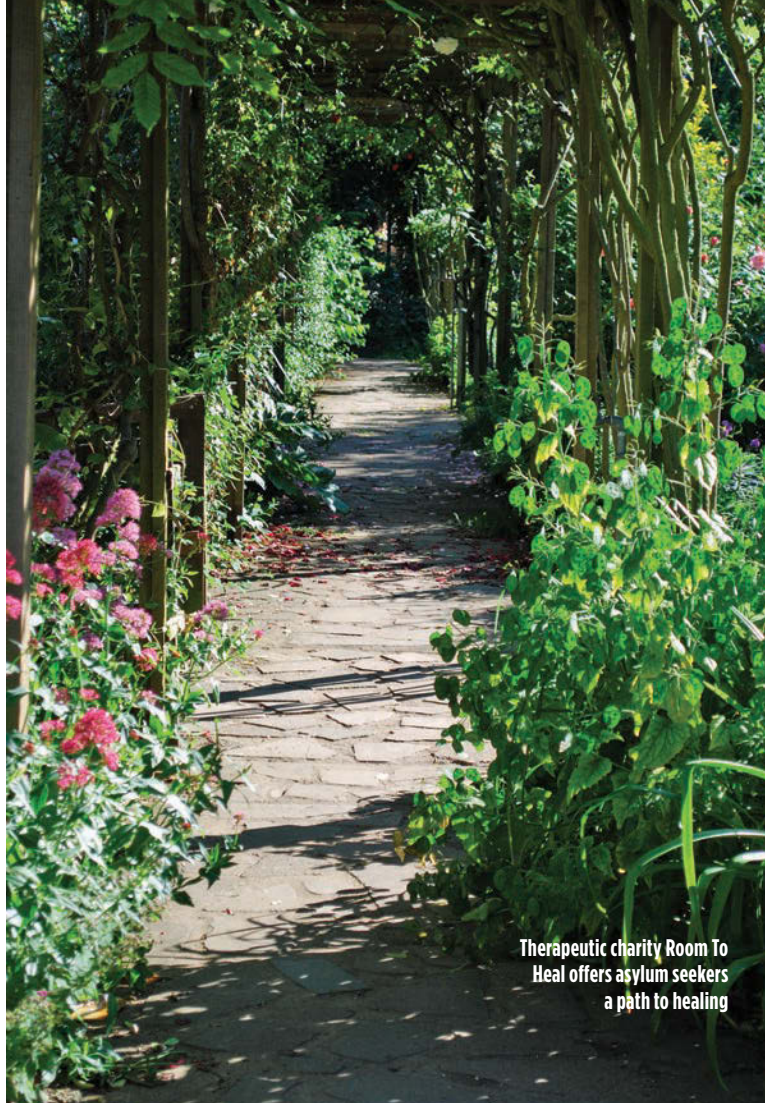


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Therapeutic charity Room To Heal offers asylum seekers a path to healing

what many women have described to me, “corrective rape”. As her tormentors raped her they shouted, “Why aren’t you enjoying it? You must be gay. You must learn to enjoy sex with a man”.

When she came to Room To Heal, Lucy was so terrified of men that she’d jump off the bus if one sat beside her. After a long period of therapy, she decided to come on one of our mixed-gender rural retreats in Devon. At first she found it really hard to even be in a room with the men. She panicked. She wanted me to stay with her all the time. On the first day we all walked to a river. The guys were swinging across on a rope. Lucy decided she wanted to do it. The rope was thin and Lucy was big. I knew what was going to happen and the words “health and safety!” ran through my head, but she was adamant she wanted to do it and I knew she had to try. We all stood on the bank, the men too, as she launched herself over the water and fell right in. I was worried she could have been hurt but she stood up in the river, soaking wet but laughing. The men reached out to her and she took their hands

and they pulled her onto the bank. It didn’t matter that she had fallen. She was ecstatic. “Finally I’ve done something that I chose to do,” she said, “for the first time in my life!” And from then on she started to trust the men and over the course of the retreat she realised they’d also been raped and tortured: they were not aggressors, but brothers. That was a few years ago. Since then she got her papers and though she’s left Room To Heal, she comes back from time to time to see her chosen family. She can sit on the bus without worrying and she’s training to be a nurse.

Mabel, a gay woman in her early 20s, showed me scars all over her body from where a witch doctor had ceremonially cut her to cure her of her demons. She was 10 years old at the time, and liked to dress as a boy. Despite her name being plastered across the internet as a lesbian, and despite having extensive evidence of the abuses she had endured, a few months ago Mabel was detained by the Home Office and her case refused. She was told she’d be forcibly removed to Uganda. She was texting

me as they took her to the plane. She was absolutely terrified and certain she was going to be killed. Somehow she managed to resist getting on the plane, buying us enough time to get her a new lawyer and put in an appeal. Because of this she’s now been released, but she still has no “status” and is deeply traumatised by the experience. She’s told me she’ll kill herself before it happens again.

I get angry when I see how hard it is for people like Mabel, who’ve fled so much pain, to seek sanctuary here. Unfortunately I witness the asylum system not working well at all, and how a culture of pervasive disbelief hurts people and prevents their healing. Things are getting worse. Politicians increasingly use asylum seekers as scapegoats for society’s ills and more and more services are cut. Charities like ours struggle to survive.

I get angry but I am also inspired by the people I meet at Room To Heal, by our community, and what I know it does for people who belong to it. We don’t simply talk about the darkest aspects of peoples’ histories; we have a good time together and, given what people have been through, having a good time means a lot. We go on retreats to the countryside and swim in the sea and grow our own food and dance quite badly. Nothing’s more meaningful for me than seeing someone arrive here hopeless and suicidal and then witnessing them build a meaningful new life, with the help of our community.

We’re a community made up of people from every corner of the world, and though we’re united by experiences of violence, the worst that human beings can inflict on one another, somehow we’ve created a community that represents what’s best about human beings and that makes me happy and proud. 📍

If you’d like to find out more or support our work by becoming a friend of Room To Heal please go to [roomtoheal.org.uk](http://roomtoheal.org.uk) or contact [chloe@roomtoheal.org.uk](mailto:chloe@roomtoheal.org.uk).

People’s identities have been disguised in this article to protect their privacy.

Lucy was so terrified of men that she would jump off a bus if one sat next to her



COVER FEATURE | SAMIRA WILEY |

# Poussey Riot

It seems bizarre now, but this time two years ago, not many people had heard of *Orange Is The New Black*. In fact, Samira Wiley, one of the show's breakout stars, was still pulling pints. "I was bartending the entire time we shot season one," the self-effacing actress says, sounding almost incredulous at the twists and turns her own life has taken.

Three seasons and countless awards later, it's hard to believe that Samira was changing out of her prison jumpsuit and heading straight from set to her very ordinary day job, but that initial reluctance to give up a steady income is understandable. Netflix was still in its infancy, and no one could have predicted the success *Orange* was about to enjoy. "No one was looking forward to season one coming out," Samira laughs. "No one even knew what it was".

SAMIRA WILEY  
TELLS CARRIE  
LYELL ABOUT  
HER JOURNEY  
FROM PULLING  
PINTS TO  
INTERNATIONAL  
PRESTIGE,  
THANKS TO  
HER ROLE  
AS POUSSEY  
WASHINGTON IN  
ORANGE IS THE  
NEW BLACK

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SAMIRA WEARS  
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BANDEAU  
BY **FREE PEOPLE**  
LEATHER CUT-OUT SHORTS  
BY **FRANZISKA FOX**  
KNEE BOOTS  
BY **AGL**  
CHRISTINA HAT  
BY **ORLANDO PALACIOS**  
@**WORTH & WORTH**  
ARM BANGLES  
BY **SLIGHT JEWELRY**  
RINGS BY  
**MING YU WANG** AND **BIJULES**



The actress, originally from Washington, DC, only handed in her notice at the bar when customers started recognising her from Orange and friends urged her to quit. "They said to me, 'Samira, what are you doing? You need to quit this job,' she laughs. "Like, 'We really think this acting thing might work out for you. Stop bartending!'"

And work out it did. The 28-year-old Juilliard graduate, who plays fan favourite Poussey Washington, became a household name virtually overnight thanks to the Jenji Kohan's series based on Piper Kerman's memoir of the same name, and while she might still be growing into the "celebrity" moniker, 800,000 Instagram followers can't be wrong.

Something of a background character in the first season, Poussey – a loveable ingenue – brought some much needed levity to the show, thanks to her double act with bezzie mate Taystee, played by real-life college pal Danielle Brooks. But despite not having the biggest part in the ensemble cast, a brilliant performance garnered Poussey a lot of attention, and going up against the villainous Vee in season two made her the underdog we were all rooting for. Says Samira: "She's sort of this hero, you know? Someone that we all strive to be."

But it took Samira a while to realise just how popular her character was. "I think it was probably after season two," says Samira, when she joined Twitter to "connect with fans one-on-one". "That's the first place I realised, wow, people really love Poussey!

**"Poussey is this hero, you know? Someone that we all strive to be"**

People are so affected and have so much affection for [her]." But it wasn't just Samira's virtual life that changed thanks to Orange. "Walking down the street [now] is such a different thing than walking down the street two years ago," she muses. "People come up to me all the time and they wanna hug me and kiss me and give me love and it's still something that I'm trying to get used to."

Despite her run-ins with the law – her backstory hints at selling weed – a sense of right and wrong sets Poussey apart from her fellow inmates in Litchfield, and words like loyal, brave and noble are often attributed to her. Samira admires her too, and says Poussey is the kind of person she wants to be. "I think out of all the characters I've played, I'm pretty close to Poussey. I try, at least, to have a strong moral compass like she does. Even if I'm not exactly like her, I know that I strive to be."

Samira and Poussey have something else in common: they're both gay. Did she know that when she auditioned for the part? "I had no idea," says Samira, but wasn't surprised when the writers developed her character in that way. Was it a personality trait written for her, especially? "My performance is informed by the work on the page, and I'd like to think the writing is informed by my performance. I'm positive that something they saw in me helped them go in that direction."

Samira came out to her family aged 21 and her parents, co-pastors of Covenant Baptist United Church of Christ,

were open and accepting. But with a big public profile come big decisions about whether or not to be open, honest and out. Was that difficult? "I just live my life, for lack of better words," Samira says. "I didn't have any agenda of trying to make some huge statement. I'm looking forward to a time where queer people don't have to do that, where we can just live our lives and that's fine."

She might not have made a big public coming out, but Samira certainly understands the importance of being visible as a queer person of colour and has become something of a poster girl for the LGBT community, gracing the cover of OUT magazine and accepting the Human Rights Campaign's Visibility Award earlier this year with an emotional speech. How did that feel? "Oh gosh, it feels so surreal," she says, her voice cracking slightly. "Thinking about me growing up and people I had to look to that looked like me... I don't know how many people I can point to. I feel so honoured and privileged and humbled by all the recognition and the accolades I've been given." Awards notwithstanding, it seems the messages Samira gets from young women on Twitter or Instagram mean more. "[Knowing] my life has given them hope, and inspired them, and given them courage?" she says. "I can't believe it. I'm like, that's me? I'm doing that? I don't even have the words. It feels powerful, and it feels like I have a certain responsibility."

But not everyone in the public eye wants that power and responsibility. Is ►





SAMIRA WEARS  
AVIATOR SHEARLING JACKET  
BY **VIKTOR LUNA**  
CLINTON NUMERICAL CROPPED MESH TEE  
BY **KAROLYN PHO**  
LADY KILLER CULOTTES  
BY **C/MEO COLLECTIVE @SHOPBOP.COM**  
BOOTS  
BY **AGL**  
CUFF  
BY **BRANDY PHAM**  
LINE EARRINGS  
BY **MING YU WANG**  
SILVER SPLIT RING  
BY **ROBERT LEE MORRIS**  
STERLING SILVER DOME RINGS  
BY **SLIGHT JEWELRY**



SAMIRA WEARS  
KARA SHIRT  
BY **SURFACE TO AIR**  
MOTO PANT  
BY **CAPULET**  
HEELS  
BY **ALEXIS GAMBLIN**  
NECKLACE  
BY **AND\_I**  
CHAIN-BRACELET  
BY **AND\_I**  
TWO-PIECE RING  
BY **BIJULES**









SAMIRA WEARS  
SPIN JUMPER TOP  
BY **SURFACE TO AIR**  
BITS & PIECES DISTRESSED DENIM  
BY **[BLANKNYC]**  
CAPRI SUNGLASSES  
BY **SURFACE TO AIR**  
PATENT OXFORDS  
BY **TOPSHOP**  
FLANNEL  
BY **VINTAGE**





"I'm still trying to figure out the line between my public life and what I will keep private – just for my own sanity"

she happy to take it on? "I hear some people say, 'Well, I'm not a role model. I'm just living my life, people shouldn't look up to me,' but especially because of how things have happened in my life, I want to be able to take on that responsibility. Instead of rejecting that, to take that on. Knowing the influence I have, I'm just trying to step up to the plate."

It might seem as though Samira lives her life completely in the open. Happy to talk about her sexuality, she also lets fans into her life through Instagram. But for as much as she does share, there is one thing Samira won't talk about and that's her relationship with *Orange* writer Lauren Morelli, who famously realised she was gay while working on *Orange*, subsequently divorcing her husband of two years.

First photographed together last summer, while the pair have never hidden their relationship, it's not something they're keen to talk openly about. How do they decide on those boundaries? Says Samira: "I'm such a baby when it comes to this fame stuff, so honestly I think I'm still trying to figure that out. I'm trying to draw the line of what is mine. What I shouldn't, and I won't, share with the world because I need to have parts that are just mine and figure out the delineation between my public life and what I will keep private – just for my own sanity. I'm still trying to figure that out. I don't even know if I necessarily have a clear cut answer right now."

Striking that balance is important in her real life interactions too, and ►





SAMIRA WEARS  
MICRO PLEAT T-SHIRT DRESS  
BY **ALEXANDER WANG** @SHOPBOP.COM  
LEATHER JACKET  
BY **BLK DNM** @SHOPBOP.COM  
LEATHER BALLCAP  
BY MARC BY **MARC JACOBS**  
SUNGLASSES  
BY **HAZE COLLECTION**  
HI SHINE SNAKE LEATHER 1460 BOOT  
BY **DR. MARTENS**  
KNEE SOCKS  
BY **RADII**  
STERLING SILVER WITH SMOKEY  
QUARTZ RING (RIGHT HAND)  
BY **MING YU WANG**  
DUAL GOLD RINGS (RIGHT HAND)  
BY **WOUTERS & HENDRIX**  
STERLING SILVER ENGRAVED  
RING (LEFT HAND)  
BY **MING YU WANG**  
KNUCKLE RING (LEFT HAND)  
BY **BIJULES**



SAMIRA WEARS

TOP

BY **BLACK'D**

PERFORATED PENCIL SKIRT

BY **LEKA**

SNEAKERS

BY **KOIO COLLECTIVE**

STERLING SILVER AND BLACK

PLATINUM SPIDER RING (*RIGHT HAND*)

BY **SLIGHT JEWELRY**

RING (*RIGHT HAND*)

BY **AND\_I**

RINGS (*LEFT HAND*)

BY **BIJULES**





SAMIRA WEARS  
VINTAGE DISTRESSED TEE  
BY **NASTY GAL**  
LOUCHE PANT  
BY **SMYTHE**  
PORKPIE HAT  
BY **ORLANDO PALACIOS**  
@**WORTH & WORTH**  
EAR CUFFS  
BY **BIJULES**  
CUFF  
BY **BRANDY PHAM**  
RING (RIGHT HAND)  
BY **SECOND DAUGHTER**  
RINGS (LEFT HAND)  
BY **MING YU WANG**  
AND **SLIGHT JEWELRY**





SHEER TANK TOP  
BY **NASTY GAL**  
BANDEAU  
BY **FREE PEOPLE**  
ARM BANGLES  
BY **SLIGHT JEWELRY**



VINTAGE DISTRESSED TEE  
BY **NASTY GAL**  
LOUCHE PANT  
BY **SMYTHE**  
PORKPIE HAT  
BY **ORLANDO PALACIOS**  
**@WORTH & WORTH**  
EAR CUFFS  
BY **BIJULES**  
CUFF  
BY **BRANDY PHAM**

Samira is keen to protect her privacy while acknowledging the adoration of fans and giving them what they want. "Whatever happens when someone comes up to me, that's always going to be their story. 'When I met Samira Wiley'. There's a balance of trying to make that experience an unforgettable one for them, but also trying to take care of myself as well, because if I am having a meal with my mom who I haven't seen in months and every two seconds someone is coming up to me and I'm trying to make their day, then I'm neglecting myself and I'm neglecting my family. Trying to juggle that has been really hard for me."

No wonder. Overnight fame, like that experienced by the Orange cast, must take some getting used to. But three seasons in, Samira feels like she's growing into it. "It's been such a journey," she says. "If you asked me this question a year ago, all I would be able to talk about was my uncomfotability!" she laughs. "I've only just become comfortable sort of saying those words and knowing that I'm talking about myself, but I think that with each passing day it becomes a little easier and I can walk through the world with

**"Missy Elliot retweeted me the other day! I don't know what to do..."**

a little more confidence and not as awkward as I was before."

It might be hard to imagine someone who seems to ooze confidence and inspires adoration from legions of fans as awkward, but she's not so different from that girl who worked in a bar, and just like you and me, she gets starstruck too. Which celebrities make her go weak at the knees? She whispers: "Missy Elliot retweeted me the other day... I have been listening to Missy since the 90s! I'm still trying to figure out what to do about it because I haven't said anything yet. Should I geek out and fan out and write her another tweet or is that weird? I'm still racking my brain about what to do with Missy right now."

As the stars of Orange get ready to film season four, Samira is setting her gaze a bit further and eyeing up a return to theatre. "It's so interesting that I sort of entered the public consciousness through the medium of television just because my whole background and what I feel most comfortable in is theatre," she says. "Playing the same character for going on into our fourth season is something that I've never done before. I'm enjoying it but I'm

also eager to get back into theatre soon."

But Poussey fans need not worry. A talented singer as well as an actress, Samira says she would love to combine singing with her number one passion, and wouldn't rule out an Orange Is The New Black musical hitting a stage near you in the future. "I guess I'd have to get some more information on this musical!" she laughs heartily. Her dream theatre role, though, would be Shakespeare's Juliet, but who would be her Romeo in a queered up version? "Gosh. That is a question that requires so much thought," she says. What about Missy Elliot? Samira cackles. "That's funny! I'll have to work up the courage to tweet her first then maybe we can talk about her playing Romeo." **D**

Orange Is The New Black is available now on Netflix.

Subscribers to DIVA receive a free monthly newsletter with exclusive content. Sign up today via [edit@divamag.co.uk](mailto:edit@divamag.co.uk), putting Subscriber Newsletter in the title, to find out exclusively what Samira has to say about her craziest fan moment and what the future holds for Poussey and her prison pal Taystee.






YOU DON'T NEED THE LUCK OF THE IRISH TO HAVE A GOOD TIME AT DUBLIN'S HOTTEST GIRL-CLUB



Want to know what the craic is for girls who like girls in Dublin? It's all about Crush.

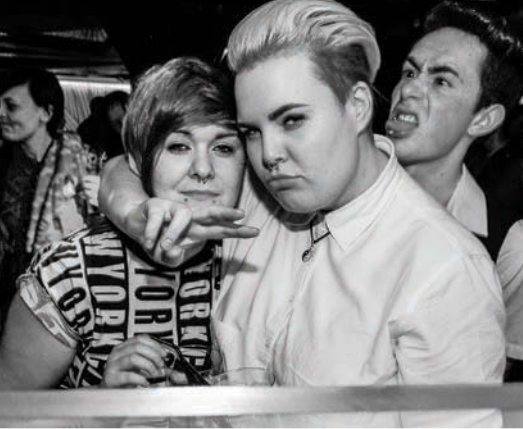
This anything-goes night, which has been running for two years, was started by Emily Scanlan and Gay Community News and takes place every third Friday of the month at Club Lafayette on the city's Westmorland Street.

A mixture of friendly staff and customers plus a dash of Beyoncé make Crush an intoxicating and irresistible cocktail of fun for girls who don't take themselves too seriously.

So what are you waiting for? Turn up, have fun and get Crushed. 

[facebook.com/crushdublin](https://facebook.com/crushdublin)









LONDON

### GALLERIES AND SHOPPING

B&B Belgravia ([bb-belgravia.com](http://bb-belgravia.com)) was set up by three women, one of whom is lesbian, and they actively market to the LGBT community. The Georgian exterior belies the interior, which is contemporary and stylish. They also offer self-contained apartments and studios. The bedrooms are on the small side but everything about them shouts quality and comfort. It's in a great location: 10 minutes' walk to Peter Jones and the Saatchi gallery on the King's Road, round the corner from the Chelsea Flower Show and easy tube access to Wimbledon tennis. There are loads of chic shops, cafes and pubs on the next street.

EDINBURGH

### HAGGIS WITH STYLE

Ardmor House ([ardmorhouse.com](http://ardmorhouse.com)) is a gay-owned boutique B&B just 10 minutes' walk from the city centre and round the corner from the LGBT district. Co-owner Barry says: "We offer the standard of a larger hotel but with the intimacy of somewhere small, coupled with a lovely environment for a gay traveller to make them feel at home." This place is "cheap chic", stylish and luxurious, yet affordable. If you want to try haggis, they'll include it with your breakfast. The produce is all locally sourced and even the coffee is roasted nearby. They also have a self-catering apartment.



# CHECKING IN

KATRINA ALLEN TAKES A TOUR OF SOME OF THE FRIENDLIEST PLACES TO STAY AROUND THE UK

A few months ago, I checked into a hotel with my partner to shocked stares when we asked for a room with a double bed. While other guests shuffled uncomfortably behind us, I saw the receptionists exchange meaningful glances. It was a demoralising start to what was meant to be a relaxing break.

Over the years, we have often faced similar homophobic reactions, but this was probably the most humiliating. So, for future breaks, I've researched some places to stay countrywide, which are LGBTQ-owned or at least friendly towards us, where we won't be subjected to those disapproving glares.



BRIGHTON

### LGBTQ MECCA

Lesbian partners Julie and Melina own Coward's B&B ([cowardsbrighton.co.uk](http://cowardsbrighton.co.uk)). It's both welcoming and comfortable, with bed-sheets so soft, I momentarily thought my cat was in the bed. It's in the vibrant LGBT Kemptown community so no problems holding hands round here. The nearby Marlborough on Princes Street, a snug bar, is particularly popular with lesbians. The B&B is just five minutes' walk from the beach and the pier: well, it would be senseless not to check out the dodgems and candy floss if you're in Brighton.

OXFORDSHIRE

### TOWN AND COUNTRY

Duck End Cottage, a 13th-century thatched cottage in Stanton Harcourt, is a mere 15-minute drive to Oxford and within easy reach of Blenheim Palace and the medieval village of Burford. It's set in an acre of garden with a big veggie patch where you're welcome to help yourself (no need to sneak out in the night...). Keep your eyes and ears skinned for kingfishers, owls and the "six o'clock heron". It's thoroughly LGBTQ-welcoming. In order to book, ring the owner, Sue, on 07947 199 625 or email [suekench1@gmail.com](mailto:suekench1@gmail.com).







#### WHITBY

### VICTORIAN SEASIDE FUN

Run by Amanda Boorman and her partner Claudia, La Rosa Hotel ([larosa.co.uk/hotel](http://larosa.co.uk/hotel)) on the West Cliff pays homage to the quirky likes of Lewis Carroll who resided in these very rooms on his many visits to Whitby, as would we if we had the good fortune to visit more frequently. Everything from the curios in the tea-room to the romantic Caravan and Arabesque themed bedrooms (and the breakfast served direct to your door in a basket) makes this a very special place to lay your head. Arrive a stranger at this vintage and magic-inspired, one-of-a-kind B&B and leave feeling like a friend.



#### DORSET

### ADULTS-ONLY GLAMPING

"Crafty Camping" ([mallinson.co.uk](http://mallinson.co.uk)) makes for a quirky break. It's also very popular with lesbians. Kids under 18 aren't allowed so you're unlikely, one would hope, to be woken by wails in the night. It consists of yurts, tipis and bell tents, all with wood burners, so it's definitely on the "glamping" side. There is even a sauna hut. Set in a magical woodland, it's been beautifully put together by owner, Guy Mallinson, a carpenter and cabinetmaker. They run woodmaking workshops from a two-hour "have a go" to a five-day chairmaking course.

#### NR BUDE, NORTH CORNWALL

### SUN AND SURF

Stratton Gardens Guesthouse ([stratton-gardens.co.uk](http://stratton-gardens.co.uk)) is run by wives Jan and Liz. It's a 16th-century house in the old part of historic Stratton. Surfing is big in Cornwall and there are a number of local schools, which run courses year round, from beginners' to advanced. Other activities include fishing, cycling and riding or just walking the coastal paths. Don't forget to try Cornish pasties and cream teas. The beaches are great and the weather in Bude is known to be the sunniest in Cornwall. Try an in-house massage or reflexology session with Liz, a holistic therapist.



#### IRELAND

### MEANDER BY THE SEA

The Inlet ([wexfordinlet.com](http://wexfordinlet.com)) is a cosy and peaceful self-contained cottage in Co Wexford, owned by lesbians, Sarah and Elena. It's adjacent to their house (not that you can hear them). I arrived to a spread of fresh eggs from their own hens, home-made marmalade and some delicious soda bread. The fire was laid and ready to go. If you like pottering by the sea and doing a bit of birdwatching, this place is spot on. The cottage is filled with DVDs, games and books so if the weather turns bad, light the fire and hole up for the day.

#### WALES

### DOGS AND DOLPHINS

Oriel Milgi ([orielmilgi.co.uk](http://orielmilgi.co.uk)), a boutique B&B in the coastal village of St Dogmaels, is owned by lesbian couple, Anne and Helen, and their three whippets. It's an old Welsh stone cottage with low ceilings and original slate floors. There's great walking on the Pembrokeshire coastal park as well as sailing, kayaking and even dolphin-watching. They are clearly dog-crazy and offer a dog-sitting and even a dog-walking service. It's within easy walking distance to several pubs and tearooms and 20 minutes to the bustling market town of Cardigan. Tuck in to the award-winning, locally-sourced, cooked breakfast.

#### LAKE DISTRICT

### WOMEN-ONLY WEEKENDS

Sisters Denise and Jenny, both lesbians, own The Knoll ([theknoll-lakeside.co.uk](http://theknoll-lakeside.co.uk)) on Lake Windermere. They host women-only weekends on Valentine's and New Year's Eve and hold a licence for civil partnerships/weddings so you could book out the whole hotel. It's in a beautiful setting where owls hoot at one another in the night. Book a private walking tour with a local (you may spot some red squirrels), have high tea and a spa treatment at the local Lakeside Hotel or maybe take a lake cruise to the buzzing towns of Bowness and Ambleside.





# BROADOAKS COUNTRY HOUSE

## THE PERFECT FAIRYTALE VENUE FOR WEDDINGS & CIVIL PARTNERSHIPS

Your wedding day should be perfect, Broadoaks Country House is the ideal fairy-tale venue to host your special day. Steeped in history, beautiful to view and magical to feel, you will never forget this special wedding venue, which has been named one of the most romantic hotels in the UK by the AA. The secluded gardens, the magical beck that runs through our grounds and the Lake District scenery provide the perfect backdrop for romantic photographs.

And guess what? We are gay-owned. So you won't need to worry about anyone asking who the groom is.

At Broadoaks – one of the most beautiful venues in the Lake District – we have a small, dedicated and very experienced team who have organised, catered and delivered some of the most memorable wedding days imaginable. Whether your wedding is an intimate one for just the two of you, or larger – for up to 150 guests – our team will work with you to help plan your special day.

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Broadoaks is pet-friendly and has a number of rooms that will make your pooch think they've gone to heaven. Our Doggy Dinner, Bed & Breakfast tariff, designed by Molly the hotel Cockapoo, offers a hot breakfast and dinner from our 4 paws menu so your friend doesn't feel left out!

Hire our entire hotel and all 16 rooms plus food and drink from only £2,995

If you are already married, or simply fancy a romantic break away then we would also love to meet you.

Please contact Viki or Little Jo on [events@broadoakscountryhouse.co.uk](mailto:events@broadoakscountryhouse.co.uk) or call **01539 445 566** to make an appointment for us to show you around.



**Broadoaks Country House**  
**Bridge Lane, Troutbeck, Windermere, Cumbria LA23 1LA**

[www.broadoakscountryhouse.co.uk/weddings/gay-weddings/](http://www.broadoakscountryhouse.co.uk/weddings/gay-weddings/)







WINDERMERE, CUMBRIA

### FAIRYTALE LOCATION

Five minutes from Lake Windermere, Broadoaks Country House Hotel ([broadoakscountryhouse.co.uk](http://broadoakscountryhouse.co.uk)) is a fantastic place to relax and unwind. Secluded yet well-connected, Broadoaks boasts unique rooms bursting with personality, a Michelin-recommended kitchen and the use of the

nearby spa and pool, all of which combine to make it an unforgettable place to stay. Not to mention the incredible views, friendly staff and Molly, the house cockapoo. Broadoaks is also an ideal venue for weddings and civil partnerships. Arrive in style on the helipad and say "I do" in front of friends and family at this fairytale location. (D)



DISS, NORFOLK

### LESBIAN GASTRONOMY

If you fancy a weekend away in Norfolk, you'll be utterly spoilt by Sue and Sam at Woolsey Bridge Farm ([woolseybridgefarm.co.uk](http://woolseybridgefarm.co.uk)). This lesbian-owned gastro B&B is perfect for any occasion, and the Michelin-quality food rustled up by Sam will not disappoint. Everything is made fresh using locally-sourced produce and fruit and veg grown on the farm, and the couple will happily rustle up something for guests with special dietary requirements. But it's not just about the food. Enjoy comfortable rooms, idyllic gardens and a whole host of activities within easy reach of this gorgeous farm. (D)



BRIGHTON

### SUN, SEA AND SCENE

A seafront hotel, bar and club and the whole of gay Brighton on your doorstep? It must be Legends ([legendsbrighton.com](http://legendsbrighton.com)). Hip, friendly and luxurious, Legends is one of the finest gay hotels in the UK and the lovely staff will make you feel at home. Relax on the terrace and enjoy stunning panoramic sea views, or hit the town and enjoy the hustle and bustle of the nearby North Laines. And in the evening, you don't need to go far to have a good time as Legends transforms into a vibrant and friendly bar where you can party until the early hours. (D)



BRADFORD-ON-AVON, WILTSHIRE

### FRIENDLY AND RELAXED

Explore everything the West Country has to offer from this unique village house in Winsley, which dates back to 1317 ([burghopemanor.co.uk](http://burghopemanor.co.uk)). Burghope Manor's owners, Alan and Peter, are friendly and relaxed, and their glowing Tripadvisor reviews speak for themselves. Expect style and comfort from this beautifully decorated B&B, and make new friends with your fellow guests as you swap stories over breakfast. Don't want to leave your furry friends behind? Don't worry – pets get a warm welcome at Burghope, too. (D)

TANYGROES, CEREDIGION

### VEGETARIAN HAVEN

If you're looking for a secluded rural venue, this one's for you. Over The Rainbow ([overtherainbowwales.co.uk](http://overtherainbowwales.co.uk)) is an award-winning vegetarian guest house near Cardigan Bay, home to stunning blue flag beaches and bottlenose dolphins. Lesbian-run, OTR prides itself on providing a safe and welcoming space for gay couples in the heart of the Welsh countryside, and received a Gold standard award from the Green Tourism Association for its commitment to being an ethical and environmentally responsible venue. Over The Rainbow even grow the produce for their inventive and varied menu in the grounds. (D)



LAMPETER, CEREDIGION

### IDEAL FOR ANIMAL LOVERS

Relax in the peace, tranquility and fresh country air of Lanlas Farm ([lanlasfarm.co.uk](http://lanlasfarm.co.uk)) in Wales. Close to the Cambrian Mountains, this 20-acre farm is ideal for animal lovers, with sheep, chicken and ducks roaming free, as well as James and Nellie, a pair of pet kunekune pigs. Owners Louise and Cathy encourage guests to bring their own pooch, or take part in their "rent a dog" scheme! Great for families, Lanlas Farm features two fully-equipped self-catering cottages with everything you could possibly need in your home away from home. (D)







# Taking Pride in Riga

I flew into Riga expecting the typical post-Soviet mélange of shabby tower blocks and gritty concrete brutalism. Instead, I discovered the spiritual love-child of Barcelona and Hoxton – broad cobbled avenues lined with soaring Art Nouveau buildings, and interspersed with pop-up bars, farmers' markets and warehouse parties.

In June, Riga hosts this year's Europride ([europride2015.eu](http://europride2015.eu)), making much of the fact that this massive, cosmopolitan, rainbow-soaked love-in will be taking place just a couple of hours' drive from the Russian border.

## GAY

Pride-goers will be treated to a busy programme of events, from the march itself to concerts in the Vērmanes Garden, nights out at the sumptuous Golden Club ([mygoldenclub.com](http://mygoldenclub.com)) and cosy Aristids, and free film showings at the groovy Kaņepes Cultural Centre. The women-only afterparty will be hosted by ONE ONE Club ([fb.me/oneoneriga](http://fb.me/oneoneriga)), a former lingerie factory, newly converted into a magnificent series of bars and dancefloors.

## PLAY

In between the parties, check out one of the city's numerous spas (there's even one where you can bathe in beer – [beerspa.lv](http://beerspa.lv)) have a wander round Riga's Central Market ([rct.lv](http://rct.lv)) with its endless stalls of Soviet-era tat and local produce,

## EMILY CHAPPELL FINDS THE RAINBOW FLAG FLYING IN LATVIA

or head across the river to Kalnciema Quarter ([kalnciema.lv](http://kalnciema.lv)) where Latvia's hipsters spend their weekends sipping lattes, eating street food and listening to live music. It's unlikely you'll want to escape the city (even Riga's rush hour is a picture of calm), but if you do, the sea-side town of Jurmala is just a 30-minute train ride away.

Latvian food is moving away from the stodgy Baltic staples of meat, potatoes, cabbage and pickles (though there's still plenty of that to be found!). I was particularly taken with the preponderance of rhubarb and caraway, the chicory-flavoured coffee at local chain Coffee Inn ([coffee-inn.lv](http://coffee-inn.lv)) and the delicious salmon and herring – a nod to Latvia's Nordic neighbours.

Budget travellers can fill up on MiiT's ([miit.lv](http://miit.lv)) cheap-and-tasty vegetarian pancake brunches (they'll even fix your bike while you eat), or head over to Stock Pot ([stockpot.lv](http://stockpot.lv)) for a very affordable daily menu that features meat, vegetarian and vegan delights from around the world. For late-night, post-club binges, check out Pakistānas – the only place I've ever found where you can get an edible kebab for under €2.

Further upmarket, chic wine bar Garage ([vinabars.lv](http://vinabars.lv)) counts Sting and Kylie among its clients, and is open for everything from breakfast to late-night tapas. And Osiris ([cafeosiris.lv](http://cafeosiris.lv)), one of the oldest restaurants in

Riga, serves up a light modern twist on traditional cuisine to the city's artists, intellectuals, politicians and tourists. Make sure you save room for their incredible sorbets!

Riga's a beautiful city and the perfect size for walking and cycling. Take a stroll down Alberta Street ([liveriga.com/en/2492-alberta-iela](http://liveriga.com/en/2492-alberta-iela)) for some of the finest Art Nouveau buildings in Europe, and then head over to the Old Town for winding cobbled streets, outdoor cafés, ancient churches and townhouses, and the site of the world's first Christmas tree.

Latvians are proud of their arts and crafts, and you'll find plenty of gorgeous ceramics and textiles in its street markets and souvenir shops, as well as home-grown designers like Elina Dobeļe ([elinadobeļe.com](http://elinadobeļe.com)), whose handsome hand-made shoes are taking Riga's fashion world by storm, and who is proud to be the first business in Latvia to display a "diversity friendly" logo.

## STAY

Radisson Blu have several hotels in Riga. I stayed in the Radisson Elizabete, which overlooks the park where the EuroPride march will finish up, and it's a two-minute stroll down the street to Radisson's Hotel Latvija, with its spectacular rooftop bar ([skylinebar.lv](http://skylinebar.lv)), where I recommend ordering a cocktail containing Riga's Black Balsam liqueur and watching the sun set over the city skyline. ☺

## WAY

Air Baltic offer two three-hour flights a day between Gatwick and Riga, from £67 return. The airport's an easy 15-minute taxi ride (or a 30-minute bus journey) from the city centre. [airbaltic.com](http://airbaltic.com)





## TRAVEL NEWS

## STOCKHOLM WINS



Stockholm is in favour again after 100,000 votes from the UK's LGBT community awarded the capital of Sweden "Destination of the Year" at the British LGBT Awards. Look out for the Big Gay Stockholm Summer including Stockholm Pride and Eurogames.

[gaylesbian.visitstockholm.com](http://gaylesbian.visitstockholm.com)

## DON'T MISS

## L FEST



If you love lesbians, comedy, music and the arts, it's unlikely you'll have a rubbish time at L Fest in Staffordshire this year. From 17-20 July, the Uttoxeter racecourse will be hosting all sorts of brilliant acts and speakers, including our very own editor, Jane (who'll be hosting the DIVA sex academy), and Lucy Spraggan! Camp, glamp or caravan. Bring your rainbow families and enjoy.

[lfest.co.uk/#l-fest-2015](http://lfest.co.uk/#l-fest-2015)

## FIRST CLASS

## HOT HOTEL

## NO MAN'S FORT

Original, innovative and just plain cool, No Man's Fort is the second of three man-made forts in the Solent. Originally built between 1867-1880 to protect Portsmouth from Napoleon III, it's undergone massive refurbishment and was reopened late April with 23 luxury bedrooms and facilities to cater for 200 party guests, including two helicopter pads, a cabaret

bar, laser tag, games rooms, snooker room, meeting space, roof-top hot-tubs, glass-floored lighthouse, gallery restaurant, wine bar and spa facilities with signature sea salt treatments. Rooms start at £450 per night.

[amazingvenues.co.uk/venue/no-mans-fort](http://amazingvenues.co.uk/venue/no-mans-fort)

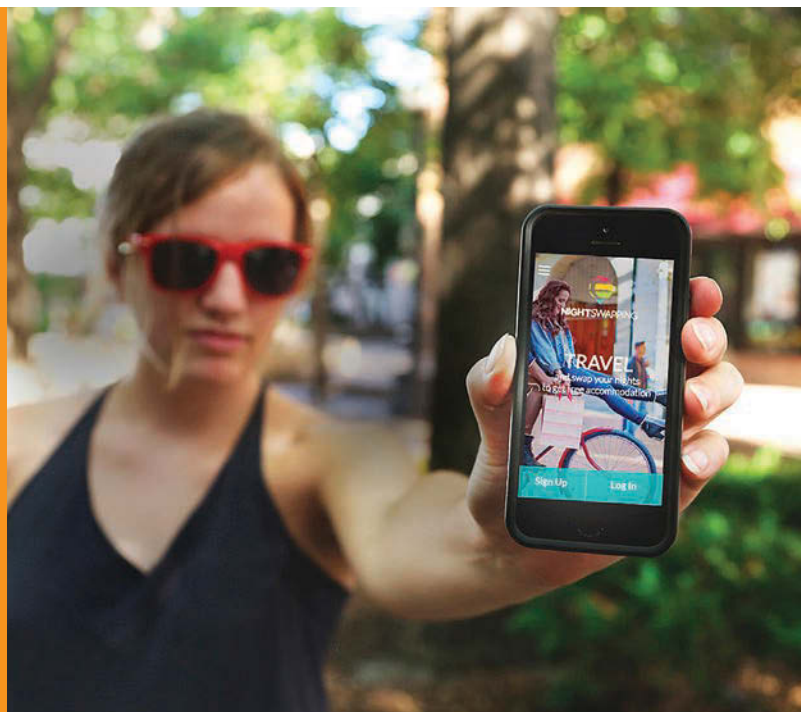


## NEWSFLASH

## NIGHTSWAPPING

It may sound like some kind of new hook-up concept, but Nightswapping is in fact a free, friendly, secure and comfortable "night swap" service that allows you to do a direct switch with another home, person or couple for a night or series of nights. It doesn't have to be simultaneous however – you can "gain" nights by hosting members for free and then reclaim those nights at a later date. The best bit? No money exchanges hands, though you can "buy" extra nights if your credit's run out.

[en.nightswapping.com/what-is-nightswapping](http://en.nightswapping.com/what-is-nightswapping)





# DIVA DIRECTORY

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## CLASSIFIED FEATURE - GS&M CONSTRUCTION

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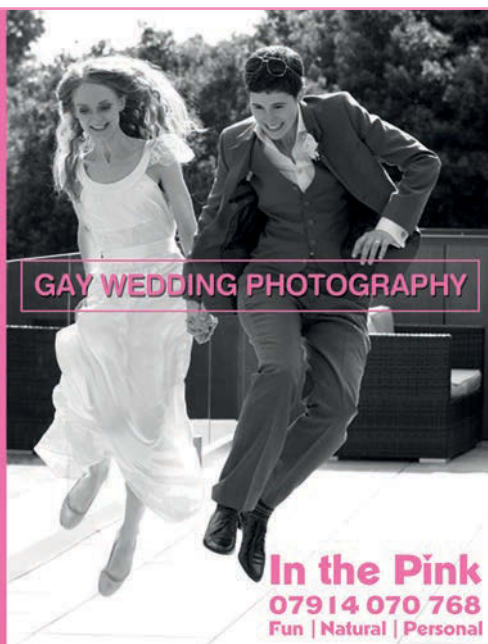
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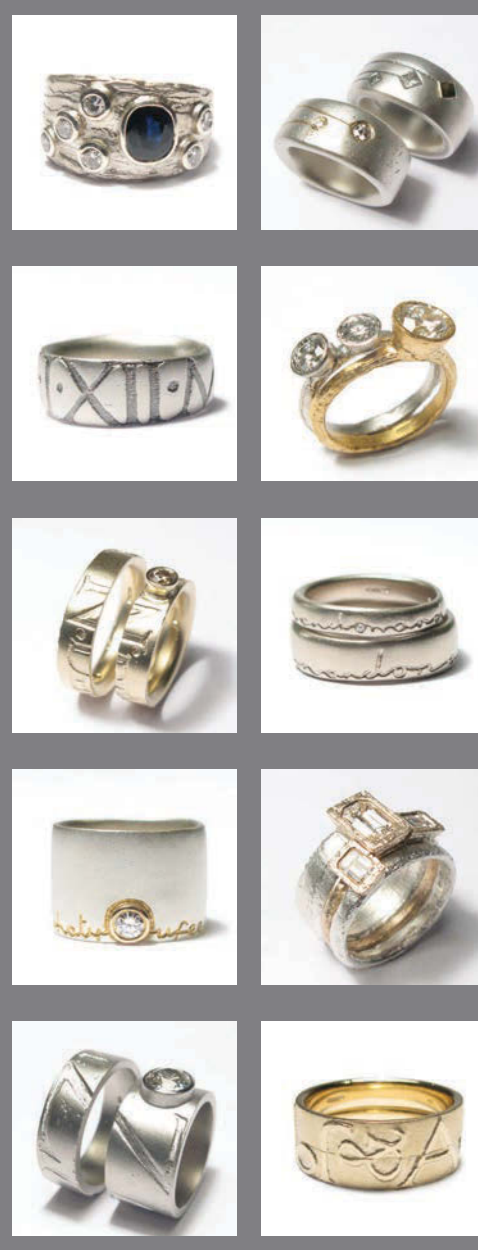
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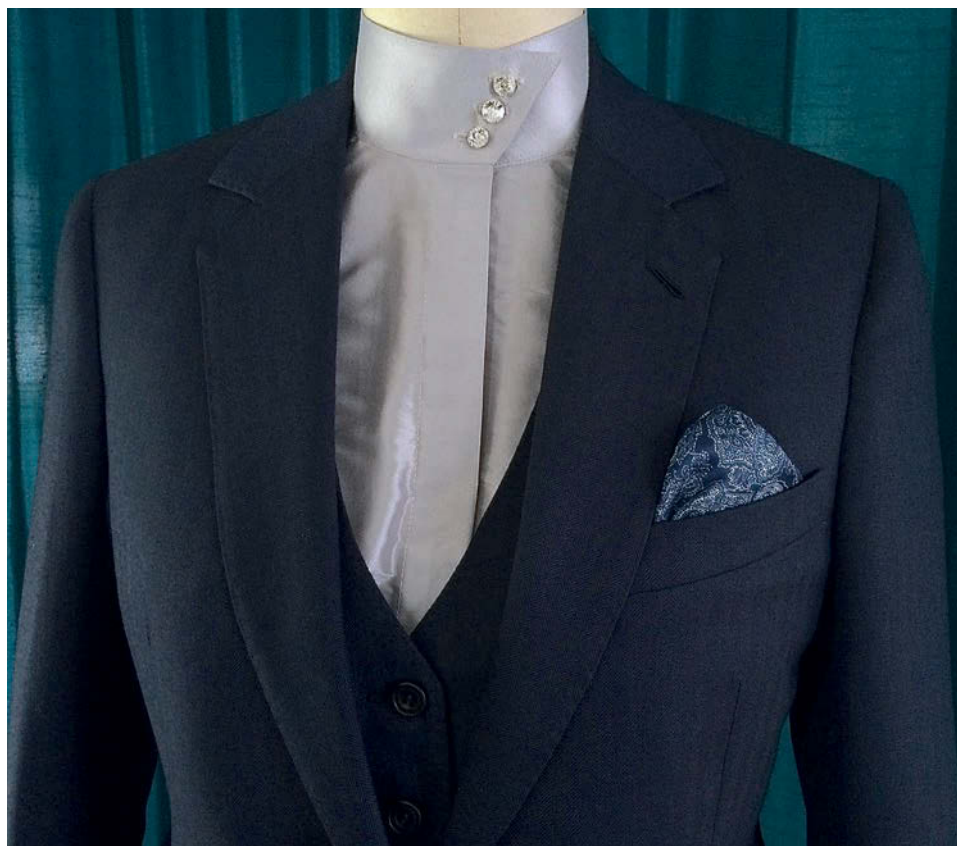
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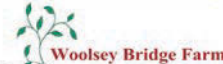
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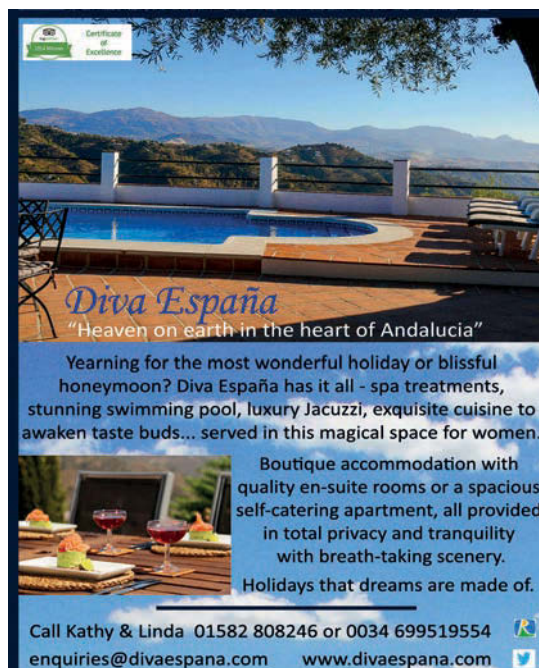
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# Summer Relief

AFTER A BAD  
BREAK-UP,  
WHAT LINDA  
NEEDED WAS  
SUN, SEA,  
SAND AND...

SHORT STORY  
CHERI CRYSTAL

It had been a year since my partner left me for a younger, fitter and prettier model. I hadn't realised just how shallow Penny was until she spat, "You're too bloody fat and I hate your hair!" Seriously? We both knew the real reason we split was due to her mid-life crisis and loss of libido – not mine. Sick of ruminating about how wrong I'd been about her, I booked a summer holiday in Dartmouth for relief. A new outlook should get me out of my rut.

The Blackpool Sands brochure couldn't capture the fragrance of sea air and pine. With luck the sunny skies would last. On day one, wearing baggy shorts and t-shirt, I carried a towel to the beach with plans of lounging while reading a trashy novel.

I finished the juicy bit in my book when I needed a stretch. On the way to the cafe, I spotted a willowy blonde posing at the kayak rental stand. With bronzed skin, belted boy-shorts and bikini bra in a brightly-coloured orange, like the safety vests worn by road crew, her demeanour shouted, "Shag me now!" Or maybe, "Caution!" My resultant adrenaline overload put me in a right mess in my nether regions. She glanced my way and with her simple nod, I was in lust. I forgot what I set out to do and had a prime view of her bum on the way back to my towel.

Before I knew it, she stood at my feet. I stared up at her breasts supported by underwire straining at the seams. Perhaps she would allow me to help before her straps gave out? She smelled of toasted coconut. Irresistible.

"Hiya, alright?" She checked me over, lingering at my lips and tits and chuckling at my toes. I could be such a girl and had painted my nails a creamy tango red called, "Forever Young".

This tanned goddess had to be a figment of my hypersexual imagination. My lips dried up and my pussy grew wet. I needed a brisk swim to camouflage my desire.

"We rent kayaks. You interested?"

I stood and brushed shingle sand off my shorts. "How much?"

"For you?" She sized me up again. "It's on me."

"Thanks mate. I haven't tried this before."

"Ok if I give you a few pointers?"

"Yes please."

She grabbed her personal kayak instead of a rental.

"You climb in front."

"Are you sure? It's rather small."

"Rubbish. I'll take the stern."

She moistened her lips and I nearly drowned. The water temperature was only 16 degrees, if that. Between her nipples popping out and my internal inferno, the cold helped keep my rising heat at bay, barely.

"I'm Handy Mandy, your instructor."

"Loose Linda," I teased back.

"Perfect partners, us." Her grin was as wide as mine. "Shall we get started then?"

"Yes, please." I may have sounded eager, but I couldn't contain my enthusiasm.

"Come closer."

She placed her arms and legs around me. "Hand me the paddle and lean way back."

No problem! Blimey, she was hot.

With skilful manoeuvres she picked up speed and rowed beyond the buoys.

"Shouldn't we stay within the marked area?"

"We'll be fine." Her muscles flexed as she steered, her crotch grinding into my bum. I nearly came in my pants.

In sync with the subtle waves, we'd moved further away from the shore when she handed me the oar. "Your turn." Her breath warmed my neck, sending shivers down my spine.

I kept a tight grip on the paddle, thrilled about my new skill, when I noticed her fingers inch their way up my thighs and past the entrance of my shorts.

"Keep going," she instructed. That should have been my line, but I was too breathless.

"Steady, girl," she said, after my paddling became erratic.

I threw my head back, lost my bearings and gasped when her fingers found my pussy.

"You feel amazing."

I gulped in sea air as she feverishly worked my clit with her thumb, thrusting two fingers into my pussy.

"Is this ok?"

"Yes, please, oh yes."

On the open water, with only the gulls and my goddess as witness, I rocked the kayak with wild abandon until my clit was ready to explode.

"Let it go!"

I came so hard, we capsized. The life vest kept me afloat, but she gave me mouth-to-mouth, just in case. After the hottest sex and sweetest kiss, I was out of my rut. What a relief.

Her  
bronzed  
skin, boy-  
shorts and  
bikini bra  
shouted  
"Caution!"



For a supporter of ethical innovation, few experiences are more exciting, exhilarating, exhausting and, erm, alliterative than heading to London's ExCel Centre to explore over 600 companies at the Natural & Organic Products Europe fair. I found some real treasures...

Joanna Benecke is a writer with a green tea addiction who believes grooming doesn't have to be a dirty word.  
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## ETHICAL DISCOVERIES

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I've always had a soft spot for butches. In the 80s I was drawn to women with flat-tops and DMs. In the 90s I lusted after tough, motorbike-riding, leather-wearing butches. And in the 00s I developed a thing for women who knew how to carry off a suit and tie. Now, half-way through another decade, I'm curious: with so much more recognition of the diversity of sexuality and gender, what does it mean to be butch today? I confess to being more than a little thrilled when DIVA readers agreed to speak with me and share their experiences.

"I've always wanted to be very masculine. When I was younger I was too afraid to express it. But as I've got older I was just like 'sod that,'" Micky (41) tells me. "I class myself as very butch: I like femmes, I'm very masculine, I have short hair, I go to the barber, I like men's clothes, I'm quite tall, I've got broad shoulders, I lift weights so I've got a lot of muscle. If that makes me very butch then that's what I am."

Ruby (23) also self-identifies as butch: "I would call myself a soft butch. To look at, I'm really masculine, I'm an engineer, but emotionally I'm quite feminine. All of my partners have been femme." Jo (42) identifies as soft butch too, clarifying, "Although I'm quite masculine in a lot of ways, I still do things like go to the hair salon. I don't wear boxer shorts or men's suits, although my friends would. That's the difference, that's why I identify more as soft butch. I'm attracted to girly girls. I love feminine women."

From talking to a number of different people, I noticed a pride and ease with the use of the word 'masculine' to describe everything from clothing, to hobbies, to personal characteristics. Where once "masculine" and "feminine" would perhaps have been assumed to correspond to "male" and "female", I'm glad that there's now more of a place for, and more of an appreciation of, female masculinity.

"I've been described as a gentleman: I still think you pull out a chair for a lady, you wine and dine them, you treat them like a princess. It's



# "IS JUST THE WAY I AM"

## ANNA SANSOM TALKS TO DIVA READERS ABOUT THEIR EXPERIENCES OF BUTCH SEX AND SEXUALITY

traditional values and I hold them in high regard," says Gemma (31). In butch-femme relationships "you create a princess role for the girlfriend," Jo explains. "With a feminine woman I'd open the door; she has to go in first. I just take on that role. It's gentleman-like to do these things. It's how I feel within myself."

Theresa (27) identifies as a femme woman who "only realised about a year and a half ago that butch girls are my type. When someone says, 'Who's the man in the relationship?' Well, [it's] neither of us, but perhaps one has more stereotypical masculine traits. It's that protector, it is chivalry".

If being chivalrous and gallant in public is one expression of being butch, next I wanted to know: what

about in the bedroom? Does the old saying, "butch on the streets; femme in the sheets," hold any truth? And what does being butch in bed mean, anyway?

"I wear a strap-on just as much as my partner," Theresa tells me. "I've had a couple of one-night stands with butch women who didn't want anything: they didn't want to be touched. That really threw me. I wanted to return the favour, but they were really quite adamant. I don't know if that was a chivalry aspect."

From a butch woman's perspective: "I probably initiate sex most of the time," says Micky. "I would wear the strap-on, I would never be penetrated with one, I don't like penetration, it doesn't feel right for me. She can man-



ually stimulate me or orally stimulate me – I much prefer that.” Jo has similar experiences: “I’m dominant in the bedroom. I wear the strap-on; I don’t like to receive it. I do like penetration but not with sex toys. If I’m in bed with a woman I’ll sort her first and she’ll sort me after that. It doesn’t work if she does me first – it’s always me taking on the role of being the lead.”

Theresa, Jo and Micky all told me about butch-femme sex, but that’s not every butch’s preference. What happens during sex between two butches?

Becca (27) identifies as a butch woman who is attracted to other butches. “A lot of people assume, in a stereotypical butch-femme relationship, the butch will make all the advances, will be the dominant one, the top. In my relationships I’ve found it’s almost like a power struggle – but I quite like that,” she laughs. With feminine women “they’ve been more passive, more willing for you to take control, expecting you as a butch woman to initiate sex. There’s less switching. They’re expecting you to pull all the moves”. With butch women “it’s like power play, where one person will try and top the other and then it will switch and switch again. I like that. If you have [a] trusting relationship, [they can] change from being butch and strong and tough to being quite vulnerable and opening up to you in the bedroom. I like that transition”.

Switching and changing sexual roles happens in other relationships too. “In previous relationships I’ve taken the more male role and I was the one who instigated sex,” Ruby tells me. “In my current relationship it’s quite the opposite: sometimes I’ll instigate it and sometimes she will instigate it; we use toys in sex and take it in turns – she wears the strap-on as much as I do.”

One thing that can influence sexual roles is how long the relationship has been going and how much space there is within that for flexibility and change. Gemma has found that “when you’ve been with someone quite a long time then you can test the boundaries of another dynamic as well. In my sexual life I am the giver. If I went on a date

and we happened to come home, I would be the active partner; I’d use the strap-on. When you’re with someone a long time you can change those dynamics and push the boundaries”.

Sharon (37) has definitely found her sexual roles changing over the years. Previously she identified as butch, felt that sex was more about her femme partner’s body than hers, and that part of the attractiveness of her butchness was that she was the one “in control in the bedroom”. She believed that being the receiver of sexual acts was something for feminine women: “I didn’t feel comfortable exploring that feminine side of myself, therefore it didn’t get explored sexually. I wasn’t used to someone touching my body.” However, in her relationship with her wife, “sexually things opened up. We talked about sex more than I had with anyone else. We explored each other’s bodies. Letting my body be touched was a major part of me being femme in the bedroom. Letting my body be seen. I let go of trying to be in control”. Whereas she previously believed she had to be either butch or femme, Sharon’s experience is that opening up sexually and taking on what she perceived as a more femme role in the bedroom, has given her the opportunity to explore her femininity in other aspects of her life too: “like growing my hair out, painting my nails, trying different clothes. Now I have the confidence to open up another side of me.”

The key thing here seems to be the importance of being able to choose and define your own identity, however and whatever that may be at any time in your life. It’s also important to appreciate that the same label can be interpreted differently depending on the individual and their unique set of circumstances. I also spoke to M (33) who uses the word “butch” to describe their identity but accepts this has limitations for them. “At the end of the day, [I’m] butch. But the [other] people who are butch are happy with their body: they’re not transgender; they’re just butch. I am in that category, maybe, but I am transgender as well. [The label] will give you at least an idea of who I am and what I look like... it’s just

a category like a man and a woman – [they] are labels as well; we are living with labels every single day.”

Being able to find a label that suits was especially helpful for those I spoke with who used online dating. Offline, there were different experiences of finding a partner, dependent on location. In some places there were more visible butches than femmes, in other locations there was little butch visibility. Butch style seemed to be more of a fashion statement (rather than personality type) in another area. And there was a general feeling that most lesbians and bisexual women are “somewhere in the middle” of the butch-femme spectrum and so not such a good match.

Whether it was butch-seeking-femme or butch-seeking-butch, an online dating profile could be used to make preferences clear from the outset. “Making contact with other butch women and getting across [that] you are interested in them sexually and not just as friends is very difficult because they just assume that butches are into femmes,” explains Becca. “Online dating is a lot easier because you can see images and pictures right away so you can see who you are looking at, [and] it’s a bit easier to communicate about things like that. Plus, with a profile, you can put straight away: ‘interested in this type of person’.”

I feel I’ve been given some helpful insight into what it means to be butch today and I’m deeply grateful to all those who spoke with me. My main conclusion is perhaps not a surprising one: being butch is a very individual thing. Sure, there are some similarities in how it is expressed but, at the end of the day, it is about communicating who you are, your preferences, and how you want to be perceived and treated in the world. As Micky concludes, “I think a lot of people are scared to identify as butch, they think butch is a dirty word. I don’t know why. For me it’s just the way I am”. **D**

Anna Sansom writes about sex every month in DIVA and at [divamag.co.uk](http://divamag.co.uk). Got a subject you’d like her to explore? Email [anna@divamag.co.uk](mailto:anna@divamag.co.uk) or tweet [@ladygarden69](https://twitter.com/ladygarden69).

**“I’ve had a couple of one-night stands with butch women who didn’t want to be touched”**





## MAYBE MORE

### HONEST, CARING

Kind, loving F, 62, n/s, likes cinema, theatre, walks, dogs & nature. WLTm F with similar interests, for LTR. Kent. Box 112412 ☎ DV 112412

### LOYAL, THOUGHTFUL

Gay F, 59, smoker, seeks affectionate, feminine gay lady, 45+, for girlfriend, fun & much more. Notts. Box 995264 ☎ DV 995264

### FRIENDLY, OUTGOING

F, 66, likes holidays, animals & meals out. Seeks nice F, 65-72, to meet up with & have a chat. Oldham. Box 438505

### RETIRED, PROFESSIONAL

Blonde, blue-eyed F, 60, 5'6", lots of interests & brilliant SOH, WLTm F as companion, friend or for r/ship. Cheshire. Box 245555

### SEEKING MS RIGHT

Single, bi F, 57, attractive & full-figured. Seeks F, similar age, for fun times. Cotswolds. Box 283751 ☎ DV 283751

### FRIENDLY, HONEST

F, 24, student, seeks F for f/ship & intimacy. Cardiff. Box 599721

### QUIET, SINCERE

F, 23, likes a few drinks out, seeks lovely F for fun times & a reason to be. Ayr. Box 357879

### BI-CURIOUS BUXOM

F, 52, size 18, seeks bisexual, or curious F, 50-65, for f/ship & fun times. Hull. Box 417395 ☎ DV 417395

### KIND, SENSITIVE

F, 46, likes meals out, cinema, shopping & the seaside. Seeks caring, honest, reliable F for f/ship & r/ship. Essex. Box 609985 ☎ DV 609985

### GOOD-LOOKING

Mixed-race F, late 30s, passionate, honest & caring. Seeks feminine, gay F for fun, maybe r/ship. Stoke-on-Trent. Box 196228 ☎ DV 196228

### CUDDLY, BUBBLY

F, 44, 5'7", loving, with big heart. Seeks similar, honest, kind F. W. Mids. Box 874664

### AFFECTIONATE, CARING

F, 51, seeks genuine, similar F for f/ship & maybe more. Belfast. Box 357756 ☎ DV 357756

### HONEST, FUN

F, 43, likes socialising & lots of laughter. Seeks F for great r/ship. Mancs. Box 741884

### HONEST, SENSUAL

F, 63, 5'8", medium build, seeks similar F for good r/ship. Ldn. Box 584603

### KIND-HEARTED, HONEST

F, 33, 5'8", medium build, likes walks, cinema & nights in. Seeks lovely F for r/ship. Co. Antrim. Box 194316

### HONEST, SINCERE

F, 50s, likes days out, animals & cosy nights in. Seeks feminine, gay F, 40-60s, for fun & hopefully r/ship. Notts. Box 161268 ☎ DV 161268

### THROUGH THE MIST

Attractive F, 52, 5'5", hazel eyes, seeks F for f/ship & r/ship. Gloucs. Box 145226 ☎ DV 145226

### BIG & BEAUTIFUL

F, 49, big heart, fun, seeks F to be her soul mate. B'ham. Box 400696

### LOVING, CARING

Sincere, faithful F, 62. Enjoys music, walking & the beach. Seeks F partner with similar interests. Kent. Box 537564 ☎ DV 537564

### SINCERE, QUIET

F, 61, GSOH, has two dogs, seeks F for good f/ship & further. Omagh/Co. Tyrone. Box 660622 ☎ DV 660622

### AFFECTIONATE, CARING, POSITIVE

F, 50s, SOH & integrity, loves countryside, animals. WLTm fem F, 50s, to share love & happiness on life's exciting journey. Surrey. Box 178830

### SINCERE, LOVING

F, 62, likes animals, quiet evenings & occasional meals out. Seeks F for loving r/ship. Herts. Box 405562

### GENUINE, FUN-LOVING

F, 52, likes cinema, nights in & out. Seeks F for fun times & possible r/ship. Mancs. Box 523480 ☎ DV 523480

### LOVELY

F, 27, seeks similar F for f/ship, fun & more. Wrexham. Box 620424

### SINCERE, GAY

F, 36, seeks gay F for f/ship, nights out, meals out, etc. Rhyl. Box 163669

### LIFE, LOVE & HAPPINESS

Sincere, loving F, 56, seeks lovely, laid-back, feminine F to share life, love & happiness. Exeter. Box 623594 ☎ DV 623594

### MUSIC LOVER

Fun, outgoing F, 41. Seeks F for nights in/out, socialising & cinema. Mancs. Box 291609

### SLIM, FEMININE

Bi F, 48, seeks similar F for fun, f/ship & maybe more. Central Mancs. Box 301282 ☎ DV 301282

### HONEST, EAGER

F, 43, seeks F for long-term, lasting r/ship. Darlington. Box 204027

### HAPPY-GO-LUCKY

F, 53, slim build, WLTm F for f/ship, hopefully leading to LTR. W. Yorks. Box 411452

### KIND, CARING

F, 45, likes cats, seeks F for loving r/ship. Stockport Box 442022

### AMOROUS, EASY-GOING

F, 48, likes the coast, cinema & animals. Seeks similar F for good r/ship. Gloucs. Box 563608

### FRIENDLY, KIND

F, 52, 5'5", medium build, seeks similar F for mutual happiness & contentment. Mancs. Box 792911 ☎ DV 792911

### GENUINE, FUN

F, 45, seeks F for socialising, laughter & r/ship. Mancs. Box 498200 ☎ DV 498200

### EASY-GOING, NICE

F, 45, likes a laugh & socialising. Seeks F for fun & possible r/ship. Mancs. Box 789818 ☎ DV 789818

### OUTGOING, FULL-FIGURED

Attractive bi lady, 57, seeks F of similar age for fun nights & more. Cotswolds. Box 515282 ☎ DV 515282

### 100% GAY

F, 54, seeks solvent, gay F for good laughs & r/ship. Mancs. Box 870496 ☎ DV 870496

### SENSUAL, HONEST

F, 52, medium build, seeks F for good times, maybe more. Soton. Box 499883

### GENUINE, FRIENDLY

F, 75, non-drinker, seeks F companion, GSOH, with car, for cinema, good food & more. Devon. Box 828190

### HONEST, BISEXUAL

F, 49, 5'4", large build, seeks nice lady for f/ship & maybe more. Powys. Box 807825

### ENTIRELY HONEST

F, 55, 5'10", has a dog & cat, likes long walks, a bit disabled, seeks F for good r/ship. Darlington. Box 381150

### TEETOTAL, HONEST

F, 72, n/s, likes holidays, socialising & conversation. Seeks loving, caring F for good r/ship. Lancs. Box 822209

### PROFESS, LIFE-LOVING

F, 60s, likes beach walks, golf & photography. Seeks kind, affectionate lady, GSOH, for r/ship. Hants. Box 457627

### FRIENDLY, PLUMP, PRETTY

Bisexual lady, 61, seeks similar F for fun times. Gloucs. Box 237013

### OUTGOING, BUBBLY

F, 49, fun, likes nights in/out & socialising. Seeks similar F for great r/ship. Co. Down. Box 657198 ☎ DV 657198

### SINCERE, HAPPY

F, 50s, likes gardens & travel. Seeks nice F for something intimate. Belfast. Box 372189

### LOVING, CARING, GAY

F, 52, likes meals out, cinema & walks. Seeks caring, loving F for r/ship. Lancs. Box 745729 ☎ DV 745729

### HONEST, AFFECTIONATE

F, 23, likes walks, films & good wine. Seeks F for good times & r/ship. Glasgow. Box 459448

### AMABLE, HONEST

F, 45, seeks genuine F for good f/ship & r/ship. Slough. Box 188074

### COSY NIGHTS IN

Sincere F, 62, medium build, likes animals, walks & some reading. Seeks n/s F f/ship & good r/ship. Warwicks. Box 733509 ☎ DV 733509

### FUN, TOMBOY

F, 36, likes football, cinema & nights out. Seeks feminine F, 30-40, for r/ship. Mancs. Box 798661 ☎ DV 798661

### SOCIABLE, SINCERE

F, 36, seeks feminine F, 30-40, for theatre, meals out & close times. Mancs. Box 978625 ☎ DV 978625

### CUTE, GENTLE, BUTCH

F, 40, black, shaved head, cuddly build, seeks honest, feminine, loyal gay F for f/ship & maybe r/ship. W. Mids. Box 507405

### FEMININE, SINCERE

F, 60, n/s, likes cinema, her dogs & walks. Seeks similar F for f/ship & maybe more. Cornwall. Box 289505 ☎ DV 289505

### VERY OUTGOING

F, 55, loves travel & the outdoors. Seeks gentle, feminine F, similar age, for great, loving r/ship. Devon. Box 527387 ☎ DV 527387

### SINCERE, LOVING

F, 39, seeks feminine F for f/ship & possible r/ship. Notts. Box 736789 ☎ DV 736789

### DARK-HAIRED, SOCIABLE

F, 45, 5'1", medium build, likes socialising, travel & motorbikes. Seeks similar F for r/ship. W. Ldn. Surrey. Box 187431 ☎ DV 187431

### CONTACT ME

Butch F, 54. Enjoys walks in the country, meals out, poetry & theatre. Seeks like-minded F. Mancs. Box 515033 ☎ DV 515033

### ATTRACTIVE, FEMININE

F, 52, but not into dresses & skirts. Seeks similar F, for nice meals & coffee. Gloucs. Box 298545 ☎ DV 298545

### BOYISH SINGLE PARENT

F, 52, enjoys the gym, fishing, pool, nights in/out, seeks honest F, similar age, for f/ship, maybe more. Swindon. Box 271087 ☎ DV 271087

### BABYFACED FEMALE

Lonely F, 37, seeks mixed-race F for good lasting r/ship & shared future. Coventry. Box 100798 ☎ DV 100798

### DEEP, PASSIONATE

F, 54, seeks stimulating F with something to say for conversation & more. SE Ldn/anywhere. Box 269592

### SPIRITUAL, SINCERE

F, 38, single mum, likes travel & writing. Seeks F for coffee, chats, possibly intimacy & more. Co. Down. Box 861404 ☎ DV 861404

### SINCERE, LOVING

F, 46, likes animals, seeks F, 40+, for loving r/ship. Herts. Box 934884

### HONEST, LOYAL, CARING

F, 62, n/s, large build, enjoys walks, theatre & film. WLTm F, 60+, for a forever r/ship. Kent. Box 704273

### CREATIVE, OUTGOING, FUN

F, 30s, staffie owner, loves DJing, clubbing, singing, drawing & socialising. WLTm loyal, mixed-race gay F for r/ship. Cov. Box 783205 ☎ DV 783205

### FEMININE, YOUTHFUL

F, 51, GSOH, thoughtful, n/s, has ME, likes animals & mystery. Seeks understanding, caring F, 38-55, for laughs+. L'pool. Box 913989 ☎ DV 913989

### POSITIVE, OUTGOING, PROFESS

F, 51, seeks F for dancing in the kitchen, dog walks on the beach, good food, laughter & romance. Newcastle. Box 436275

## NO STRINGS

### ATTRACTIVE, BISEXUAL

F, 60s, has a partner, seeks similar, bisexual lady for adult fun & f/ship. N. Surrey/Middx. Box 812077

### FEMALE RULE!

F, 22, seeks F for great times. B'ham. Box 556726

### LONG BLONDE HAIR

F, 36, genuine, broad-minded, enjoys swimming, music & horse-riding, seeks F for fun times. Suffolk. Box 255518

## JUST FRIENDS

### CONVERSATION & LAUGHS

Sincere F, 44, into food, cinema & drinks. Looking to put a group together of like-minded Fs, 35-55, for f/ship. Sheffield. Box 210859 ☎ DV 210859

### HONEST, FRIENDLY

F couple, 46, love music & meals out. Seeks like-minded F friends for nights out in Glasgow. Box 282737 ☎ DV 282737

### LIFE BEGINS...

Animal-loving F, 33, seeks friends for socialising, laughter, intelligent conversation & a little bit of mischief. Somerset. Box 757543 ☎ DV 757543

### SINCERE, TRUSTING

F, 48, likes the outdoors & learning Spanish. Seeks Fs for chats & genuine f/ship. Ldn. Box 359170

## Customer Services:

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# JANE PROBLEM NO

IF YOU'VE  
GOT ISSUES,  
WE CAN HELP

## SHE DOESN'T WANT SEX AND WON'T DISCUSS IT

Dear Jane,  
My girlfriend and I have been together almost two years and we've been living together for around 20 months. Things have been going ok, however, in the past six months she hasn't touched me and she never wants to have sex. Whenever I initiate it she turns over and asks me to tickle her back instead. I don't know what to do. She says she's scared of it but she won't ever talk to me about it, or anything for that matter! I really am at my wits' end! Hope you can help.

Frustrated Love

Dear Frustrated Love,  
It sounds as if you feel quite alone in this situation. You say you haven't been having sex for the last six months, so I'm wondering if you can cast your mind back to that time? Do you recall anything happening to her, anything that occurred between you that could have had an effect on the way she now feels about sex with you? You mention that all you know about how she's feeling is that she's scared of it. But I wonder what "it" is? Is it sex or something else? What does sex with you mean for her? What does it mean to you? Is there anything that you can think of that could be contributing to this? Could something have occurred

outside your relationship that is affecting how she feels about sex with you?

Whatever it might be, and there might be lots of things at play here (we underestimate the way that daily stress can affect the libido, for example), I do understand how frustrating the situation must be for you, particularly since you say your partner won't talk to you about it. I wonder if you could ask her to listen to how the situation is impacting on you? No one can deny how you are feeling and also it means you don't get into the awkward situation of "pointing the finger" at her. That approach tends to force people to respond defensively, which doesn't help, especially in sensitive matters such as this.

I am interested in what you say about how she reacts when you try to initiate sex – it doesn't sound as if she is rejecting you, rather that she wants some sensual touch on her back. Could it be that her sexual taste is changing and she is embarrassed to articulate it to you, fearing you might feel rejected, or could she feel guilty that she isn't giving you what she thinks you want? You don't say what you do when she asks you to "tickle" her back but if you haven't done so already, perhaps try it? See where it takes you. And if it's not what you need to make you feel good, then try telling her how you feel and what you'd like. Sometimes we hit a wall in our sexual communication, even when in a relationship of two years, and in order to get past it, it may be necessary to try a different approach – if you can, be creative, playful and courageous.

jane

## READERS' REPLIES

Try writing a letter and leaving it for her to read while you're out. Sometimes talking face-to-face about intimate issues, no matter how long you've been together, can be difficult. You clearly want to make this work so take your time and tell her how you feel, but also ask her how she feels, and ask for a written reply, telling her to take her time. Communication is key, no matter what form it takes.

Suzanne Shorty Morgan

That sounds really difficult and stressful for both of you. There must be some sort of reason even if she's simply depressed or anxious and not feeling it. I know it's hard for you too, from experience. You worry she doesn't love you or find you attractive anymore. But my feeling is that if she still wants cuddles and back rubs then that probably isn't the case. You need to find a way for her to communicate to you without putting the pressure on. I hope that helps.

Vanessa Coomber



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**GT**

# I'D RATHER GO NAKED THAN WEAR FUR

[ Be comfortable in your own skin,  
and let animals keep theirs. ]



**P!NK**  
FOR **PETA**



# Go with the flow!

The menstrual cycle is a normal, vital and vitally important process in a woman. A healthy menstrual cycle is not just a fertile cycle but also a sign that your overall health is humming along nicely. Making sure your cycle is happy is, in fact, the number one practice for any woman wanting to feel well and on top of her game.

Right now, some of you might be crying out, "But menstruation is hell, I'm in so much pain, I really struggle with my cycle, I'm a mess premenstrually, there's nothing healthy or good about it!". If any of that is true for you, do be kind to yourself and bear with us. Treating the cycle as the enemy has actually been the root of our suffering. Transforming that attitude is the beginning of the path to wellbeing and reclaiming our female power.

The menstrual cycle is *the* stress-sensitive system in women. It gives you feedback on how you are travelling emotionally and physically. And working with your cycle is also your means for managing stress and creating wellbeing.

Awareness of your menstrual cycle means being connected to yourself, is a way of decoding and understanding yourself at any one moment and also an excellent energy- and stress-management system. Imagine how you might be able to take advantage of the changes in your mood and energy if you were able to predict their pattern.

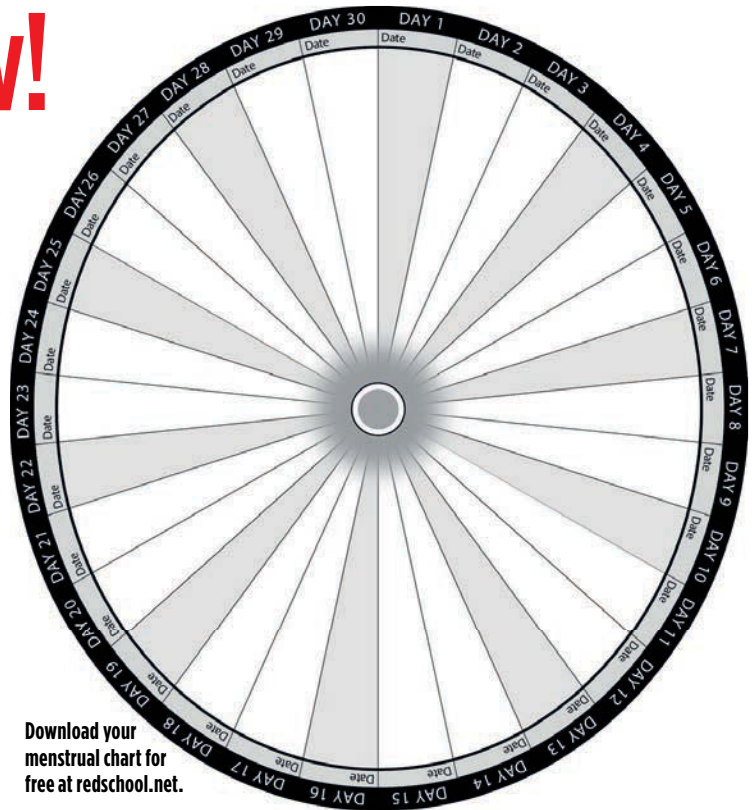
## BUILDING A RELATIONSHIP WITH YOUR CYCLE

Building a relationship with your cycle is about working with it, getting into its groove. Get started by downloading your Red School Menstrual Chart (available free from [redschooll.net](http://redschooll.net)). Print it off as large as you can. You can begin charting right now, regardless of where you are in your cycle.

- If you don't know which day you are on, just guess.
- If your cycle is irregular, start recording anyway. You might have to be a little creative in how you use our chart as it's only for 30 days – you might be working over one or two charts for one cycle of yours.

GETTING TO KNOW THE EBB AND FLOW OF YOUR MENSTRUAL CYCLE CAN REDUCE STRESS AND INCREASE ENERGY, SAY ALEXANDRA POPE AND SJANIE HUGO WURLITZER

Over time you will notice your own pattern of energy and mood



Download your menstrual chart for free at [redschooll.net](http://redschooll.net).

- If you're on the Pill, chart your Pill-induced cycle. It won't have the same intensity but you will start to get the feel of things.
- If you have no cycle at all, due to PCOS or because of some kind of hormonal contraception, then chart your mood and energy in sync with the moon phases.

### How to chart:

- On the first day of your period, record key words that capture your thoughts and feelings on "day one" of the Menstrual Chart. (The first day of your period is the day when the blood starts to flow, and doesn't refer to the odd spotting that can occur.)
- Or, if you are starting mid cycle, start recording from that day, making sure you have noted the date even if you don't know what day of the cycle it is yet.
- Record your experiences at the end of each day.
- Begin a new chart at the start of each period.
- It's well worth committing to a whole year of charting.
- Print off new charts as you need them.

Start charting your cycle today, what-

ever day you are on. If you don't know what day, have a guess, but just start recording. You'll soon find out where you are once you bleed. Write the days of your cycle into your calendar. Now watch the magic of what can unfold with this simple awareness process. Over time, you'll notice your own pattern of energy and mood throughout the menstrual month and can practice the radical act of flowing with rather than against it, as best you can. This allows you to plan your life, knowing when it's your best time for certain activities. Especially highlight menstruation, when you'll probably find you don't want to be doing stuff for others and want to be more chilled and inward-looking. At other times you may note a better ability to focus on detail, or higher energy levels.

In our Menstrual Cycle Literacy course we take you deeper in building your understanding of the cycle and how to chart it and use this knowledge to understand your own nature and live a more vital and embodied life. Join us at [facebook.com/redschoollonline](https://facebook.com/redschoollonline) to follow the adventures of Sjanie and other women's day-to-day cycle experience and add your comments and observations. 📌





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Last time I tried to write about games with an LGBT twist, I was pretty empty-handed. Godus was the only one I felt was really worth reviewing. I began to wonder whether it was possible to create a “gay” game, or whether it was really necessary. Maybe we should be encouraging game developers to include gay characters as part of their storyboarding. Then I got a press release...

Rhoda Meek is an IT consultant and designer with a social media addiction, a crochet habit, a RaspberryPi and two left feet.

[wodieskodie.com](http://wodieskodie.com)  
@wodieskodie



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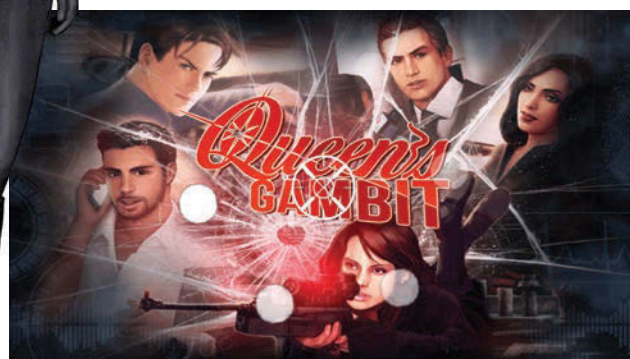
# SHE'S GOT GAME

RHODA MEEK FINDS PLENTY TO PLAY WITH

## QUEEN'S GAMBIT

Ever wanted to be a smoking hot female spy? Queen's Gambit is the game for you. I lost a few hours the other day immersed in the world of espionage. I even got to pick a lady target. Bisexual, super-sexy, female spy, anyone? That's got to brighten up the commute. When searching on iTunes and Google play, be sure to include the apostrophe, or it may not show. I love this game even more now I know that they appreciate good punctuation.

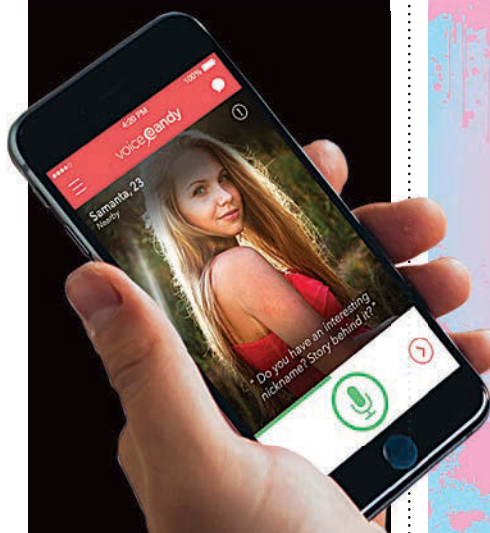
[queensgambit.voltage-usa.com](http://queensgambit.voltage-usa.com)



## DATING USING YOUR DULCET TONES

If games aren't your thing, how about another dating app? VoiceCandy uses voice to connect people. You can ask questions, give opinions and advice and submit them for vocal responses from nearby users. A new twist on dating apps, it lets you pick gender and age preferences. VoiceCandy requires Facebook to sign up, and seems to work best in London. Only available on iTunes.

[voicecandy.com](http://voicecandy.com)



## GAY FIGHTER SUPREME

It may sound like a contradiction in terms, but Gay Fighter Supreme is everything the title promises. Handsome Women Productions (in collaboration with Bearded Man Studios) have outdone themselves, creating a game with 10 LGBT fighters – including drag queen Carrie Cupcake, GoGo Gary, lesbian Sappho Ethridge and twink Timmy Spears – all competing to win the title of Gay Fight champion.

Michael Patrick, the game's founder and creator explained, “The characters are all influenced by dated jokes, pop culture icons, and camp. We wanted it to be like a Pride parade gone rogue.” Little do the fighters know, there is something ominous about the competition. The League of Oppressive Self-Righteous Zealots (LOSZR) are actually behind the tournament. Game play is simple. There are 12 levels in all and to

preserve the tongue-in-cheek nature of the game, no blood or gore is ever seen, only rainbows and unicorns. Bless. “The message I would take from the game is that the LGBT family shouldn't fight among each other,” concludes Patrick. “There are larger enemies afoot!”

Available for purchase now on iTunes, Windows and Google Play.  
[GayfighterSupreme.com](http://GayfighterSupreme.com)





June/  
July

1.07

**PEACE OUT**

*Liverpool Metropolitan Cathedral, Liverpool*  
Oh Heather Peace, is there anything you don't excel at? From looking smoking in all clothes to clenching your jaw in a sexy but troubling fashion, you SING and write SONGS too? Stop it. Stop it right now.  
[heatherpeace.com](http://heatherpeace.com)

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**SUMMER'S  
HERE AT  
LAST, SO  
GRAB YOUR  
SUNNIES AND  
HEAD ON OUT**

26.06

**THE QUEEREST OF THE QUEER**

*Resistance Gallery, London*  
Replenish your queer energy levels before your day of gay at Pride In London. Organisers The Queerest Of The Queer bring their fly game with box-busting drag, punk, dance and circus.  
[tinyurl.com/DIVAQueerest](http://tinyurl.com/DIVAQueerest)

26.06

**PRIDE PARTY**

*Craving Coffee, London*  
Hip north London joint Craving Coffee want to celebrate Pride with you. They also want to feed you some really excellent Colombian street food while you smize rainbows at each other.  
[tinyurl.com/DIVACraving](http://tinyurl.com/DIVACraving)

27.06

**PRIDE EAST**

*93 Feet East, London*  
This is looking like *THE* girls' after-party to be seen at this year. Holla! brings the RnB beats, while Mint throws a lesbian ruckus in an adjacent room. Pitch Slap! handle the house work.  
[facebook.com/PrideEast](http://facebook.com/PrideEast)

27.06

**SCISSOR THIS**

*Star Of Bethnal Green, London*  
Flighty, fun and flirty lez night, bursting with bubblegum beats to bounce to. Shake your moneymaker to Miley this Pride. Pop will eat the patriarchy.  
[facebook.com/musicpaperscissors.london](http://facebook.com/musicpaperscissors.london)

1.07

**PEAKE TALENT**

*The Theatre, Manchester*  
Gosh, what a treat! Angel on earth Antony Hegarty teams up with the supremely talented Nico Muhly to provide the music for this production of Caryl Churchill's *The Skriker*, fronted by the brilliant Maxine Peake.  
[mif.co.uk/events](http://mif.co.uk/events)

WHAT'S  
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For weekly listings,  
visit [divamag.co.uk](http://divamag.co.uk)



**1.07****GO YOUR OWN WAY**

Phones 4U Arena, Manchester  
Gold dust woman Stevie Nicks and her longstanding brethren set hearts ablaze with their cracking catalogue.

[fleetwoodmac.com](http://fleetwoodmac.com)

**3.07****HEY MOONA!**

Hackney Attic, London  
Moona Arty Party is hosted by ex-Art school women for arty farty types. Moona DJ's mix up the sound palette with 60s soul, 90s indie, old piano house, B-boy breaks and retro funk. Live happenings on stage – hold tight!

[tinyurl.com/DIVAMoona](http://tinyurl.com/DIVAMoona)

**4.07****AN AFRICAN STORY**

BFI Southbank, London  
Njinga, Queen of Angola, tells the real-life story of Queen Anna Njinga, the African woman warrior who reigned at the turn of the 16th century. Scholar-warrior Dr Ama Biney will chair a Q&A after the screening.

[tinyurl.com/DIVANjinga](http://tinyurl.com/DIVANjinga)

**6.07****NOW SCREENING**

Rich Mix, London  
An evening of film and discussion with Jamaican-British film-maker Cecile Emeke. Strolling, Emeke's web series featuring interviews with young men and women on topics from colourism to Afrofuturism will be screened, and then there will be claps.

[tinyurl.com/DIVASTrolling](http://tinyurl.com/DIVASTrolling)

**28.06****UK BLACK PRIDE**

Vauxhall Pleasure Gardens, London  
UK Black Pride is Europe's largest not-for-profit event for African, Arab, Asian and Caribbean-heritage lesbian, gay, bisexual and trans people, and friends. Superlative food, music and chatting at this year's event.

[tinyurl.com/DIVABlackPride](http://tinyurl.com/DIVABlackPride)

**5.07****FRESH FEMMES**

The Fox, Birmingham  
Are you a sucker for a woman with a beauty regime that comprises more than water → towel → roll-on? Have you got a thing for awards-ready Cara Delevingne? Are you or have you ever dated Cara Delevingne?? Then this one is for you.

[pinklobsterdating.com](http://pinklobsterdating.com)

**10.07****SOMETHING IN THE WATERS**

Sutton House, London  
Dust off your Kindles, stir that bathtub gin and start pressing those dress shirts as Late Night Library Club invites you to celebrate Tipping The Velvet – the book that catalysed your corset and oyster fetish.

[tinyurl.com/DIVAWaters](http://tinyurl.com/DIVAWaters)

**11.07****PRIDE PROM**

Mosaic LGBT Youth Centre, London  
Wow, a Pride Prom for under 18s! Blue tongues, moody girls and awkward shuffling to Rihanna expected.

[mosaicyouth.org.uk](http://mosaicyouth.org.uk)

**11.07****HUSH PRIDE AFTERPARTY**

Basement 45, Bristol  
Hush joins forces with Bristol Pride and Indigo Network to create Bristol's first LGBTQ+ women's Pride night – expect flirts, friends, laughter and unstoppable tunes from the city's top DJs.

[tinyurl.com/DIVAHushPride](http://tinyurl.com/DIVAHushPride)

**24-26.07****TRANS PRIDE**

Citywide venues, Brighton  
Trans Pride is about putting the T first. Lots of really great stuff in the schedule this year including a film night, a picnic, a pool party \*peace signs\* and a huge march for trans visibility!

[transpridebrighton.tumblr.com](http://transpridebrighton.tumblr.com)

**26.07****DYKE HIKES**

Greta Bridge, Co Durham  
Meet other lesbians who like walking and enjoy fields, farmland, a riverside path, a lost medieval village and the setting for Dickens' Dotheboys Hall. Easy, flat terrain.

[spanglefish.com/dykehikes](http://spanglefish.com/dykehikes)



# DIVA

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MARY  
LAMBERT

As her album, *Heart On My Sleeve*, launches in the UK, the *Same Love* singer talks to DIVA about being bipolar, surviving trauma and finding love.

PHOTO CHRISTA HOLKA



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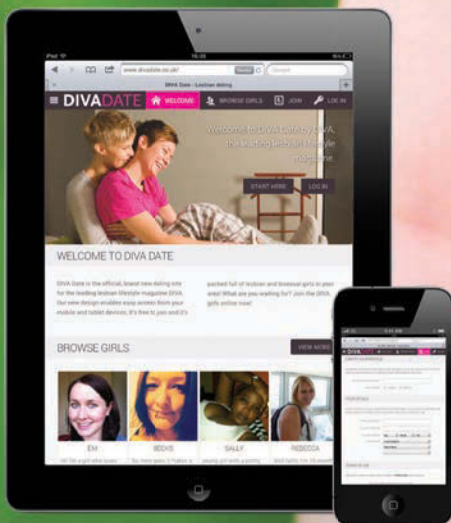
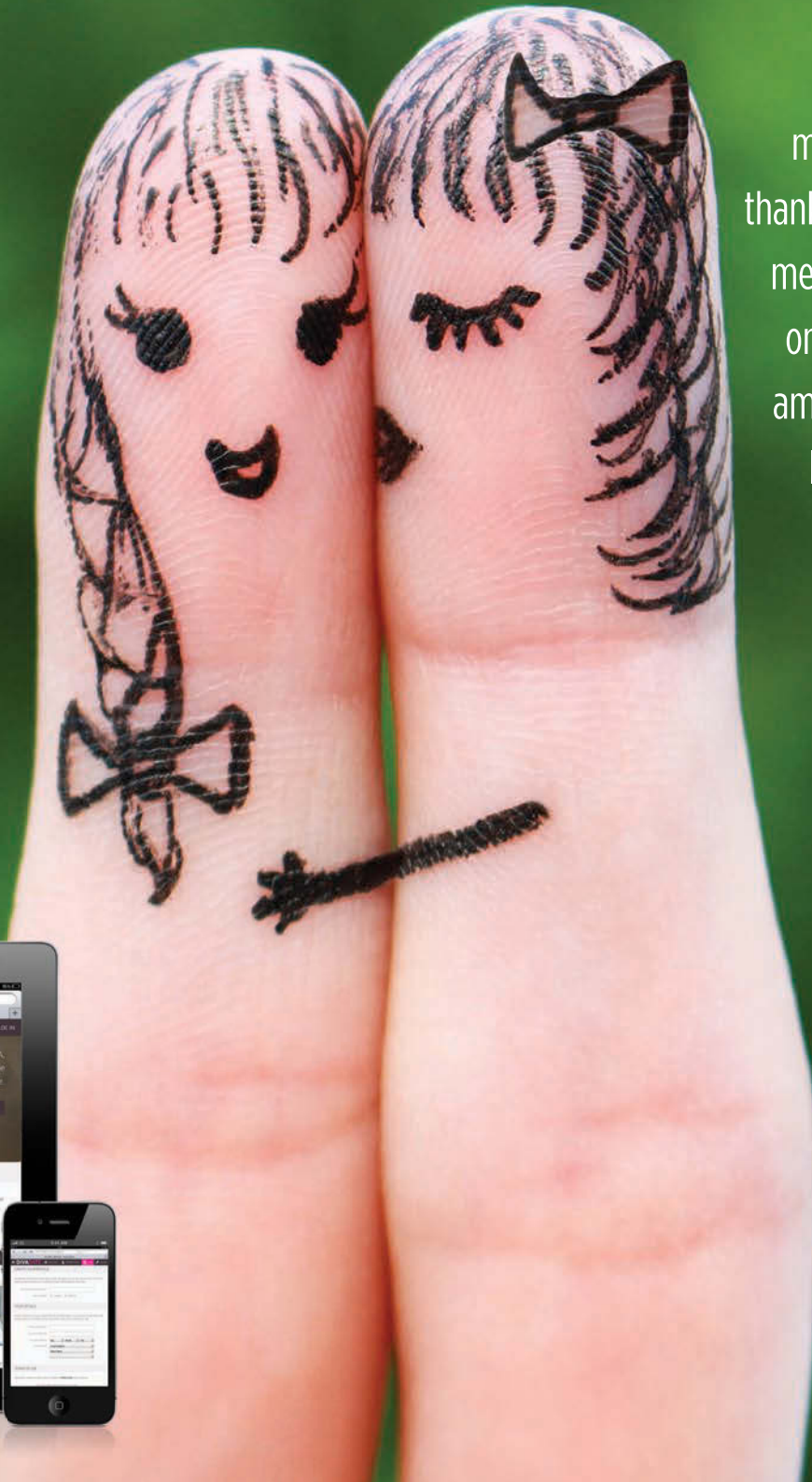
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## TESTIMONIALS

"I joined, met the love of my life within a week and 3 years on we're getting married. All thanks to DIVA Date!"

"Just a little message to say thank you, you put me in touch with one of the most amazing women I've ever met"







PECCAPICS.COM



THE GUARDIAN

**"A star is born"**

THE TIMES

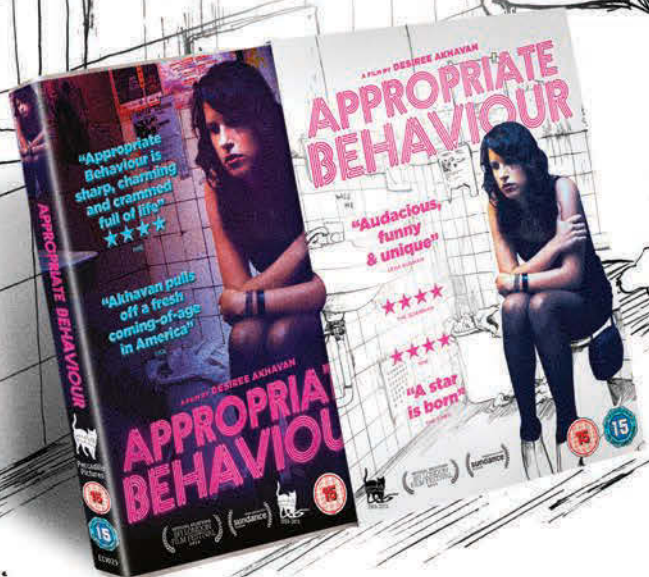


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